THE PAST IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY – UNDERSTANDING THE BRITISH APPROACH TO COUNTERINSURGENCY

A Monograph

by

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ABSTRACT

THE PAST IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY – UNDERSTANDING THE BRITISH APPROACH
TO COUNTERINSURGENCY, by Major Thomas Mcilwaine, 56 pages.

This monograph examines why the performance of the British Army in Iraq between 2003-2009
failed to match pre-war expectations.

It does so through an examination of the sources of the excellent reputation for proficiency in
counterinsurgency operations enjoyed by the British Army in 2003. It suggests that this
reputation was in part based on the successes enjoyed by the British Army during the process of
dismantling the British Empire. It goes on to suggest that the British Army's corporate memory
had failed to retain an understanding of the techniques used during these campaigns. Instead, the
monograph argues, the British Army by 2003 had an understanding of the British approach to
counterinsurgency that was based on a combination of a sanitized narrative and a faulty model.

The monograph concludes by suggesting that a deeper understanding of the essentially repressive
nature of the British Empire needs to be developed by the British Army and incorporated into its
cognitive processes if British performance is to be improved in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ACRONYMS

COIN   Counterinsurgency

COMINFORM Communist Information Bureau

EIS   Egyptian Intelligence Services

FLOSY   Front for the Liberation of South Yemen

GoM   Government of Malaya

KAU   Kenyan African Union

KCU   Kikuyu Central Association

LTTE   Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam

NLF   National Liberation Front

MCP   Malayan Communist Party

MPABA   Malayan People's Anti-British Army

MRLA   Malayan Races Liberation Army

UN   United Nations Organization

YAR   Yemen Arab Republic

"The one piece of kit we never put a UOR in for was a full length mirror, so we could take a long hard look at ourselves."

- British staff officer, Basra, March 2008[1]

Introduction

This monograph is an intensely personal piece of work. It seeks to answer a question that has dogged me since my first operational deployment to Iraq in October 2003.[2] Why was there such a disparity between the British Army's level of performance which I experienced (in 2003, 2004, and 2006) and the pre-war belief that the British Army would prove itself to be almost uniquely well-suited to the operational environment in Iraq, as a result of its corporate memory of campaigns from 1945-2003?[3]

The standard response of the British military establishment to any suggestion that British

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[1] Interview with a British Staff Officer who served in Multi National Division South East (MND-SE) Headquarters, March 17, 2013.

[2] Operation TELIC 3, October 2003 – March 2004. The author served as a Platoon Commander in the Al-Maqil District of Basra City, Basra Province.

[3] The idea of the British aptitude for COIN is an old and extremely popular one. Commentators writing in the pre-2003 period who suggest a particular British aptitude for COIN include: Thomas R. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency: 1919-1960* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1990); Ian F. W. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and their Opponents since 1750* (Oxford: Routledge, 2001); John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005). The works of Sir Robert Thompson, including *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), and General Sir Frank Kitson, especially *Bunch of Five* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977) are representative of British COIN practitioners that suggest that the British have a particular aptitude for COIN. The idea of British aptitude was slow to die, despite the difficulties experienced by the British in southern Iraq post-2003. Work that suggests the British have a particular aptitude for COIN from the post 2003 period includes: Thomas R. Mockaitis, *The Iraq War: Learning from the Past, Adapting to the Present, and Planning for the Future* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), and Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster, "Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations" *Military Review* (November-December 2005) 2-15. Interviews conducted by the author suggest that the view that the British were uniquely good at COIN permeated the lower ranks of the United States military and was slow to fade, despite the difficulties experienced by the British: (Major Robert McCarthy, U.S.M.C., interview by author, August 13, 2012).

performance in Iraq fell below the expected level (let alone below an acceptable level) is multi-faceted and reasonable. Some might suggest that my experience as a junior officer is either not representative of British military performance as a whole[4] or is representative of only a very small period in time during which the British military was beset with problems caused by overstretch as a result of political constraints.[5] Others might suggest that such a view represents a failure to understand the nuances of Counter-insurgency (COIN).[6] The idea that such a view represents a failure to understand the strategic picture of British involvement in southern Iraq is particularly popular amongst the British military.[7]

All of these arguments are reasonable (particularly those which focus on my professional failings). However, it remains the case that there is a general acceptance that there were significant weaknesses apparent in British military performance in Southern Iraq in the period 2003-2009 and that in general it is reasonable to suggest that the British performance did not meet pre-war expectations. This view has been advanced by other junior British officers,[8] other professional military observers,[9] security analysts,[10] journalists,[11] Iraqi government ministers[12]

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[4] Colonel Nicholas Chapman O.B.E., Late/Mercian, interview with the author, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, June 2011. Colonel Chapman was at that point serving as Chief C5 Plans for Regional Command South West; the author was serving as one of his staff.

[5] This argument is catalogued in Richard North, *Ministry of Defeat: The British War in Iraq, 2003-2009* (London: Continuum, 2009), particularly in Chapters 1-4.

[6] Lieutenant Colonel (now Colonel) D.H.Labouchere O.B.E., Queen's Royal Hussars, interview with the author, August 2006. Lt. Col. Labouchere was the Commander of the Q.R.H. Battlegroup at the time; the author was serving as his Battlegroup S-2 at the time, planning the repositioning of the Q.R.H. Battlegroup from Al-Amaarah to rural Maysaan Province.

[7] Colonel Ian Thomas, Late/Ghurkas, "Pointing the Way Out: The Utility of Force and the Basra Narrative January – August 2007," *The British Army Review*, 148 (Winter 2009/2010).

[8] Two examples of this are Patrick Hennessey, *The Junior Officers' Reading Club: Killing Time and Fighting Wars* (London: Penguin, 2010); Frank Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).

[9] There are a variety of articles that have attempted to analyze the British experience in

and Iraqi opposition leaders.[13] Those that argue that the British performed well tend to be those

who are contractually obliged to do so, such as senior British officers, allied senior officers, and

senior British and allied politicians.[14]

This work therefore accepts the idea (despite the ongoing debate regarding its validity)

that British military performance in Iraq fell below the level that was expected, and uses it as the

key methodological assumption for the arguments developed here. It also accepts that this level of

performance was a surprise to many observers and practitioners (external and internal) who

expected British performance to be impressive. It will examine why there was such a gap between

expected performance and actual performance in order to find out what might be done differently

in the future.

southern Iraq and why it developed as it did. The following articles present a narrative and
analysis which is broadly critical of the British performance: James Wither, "Basra's not Belfast:
The British Army, 'Small Wars and Iraq'," *Small Wars and Insurgencies,* 20, 3-4 (September –
December 2009); Daniel Marston, "Smug and Complacent: Operation TELIC: The Need for
Critical Analysis," *British Army Review* (Summer 2009). This view was also articulated by
Colonel Peter Mansoor U.S.A. (retired), interview with the author, February 2012 and Professor
Daniel Marston, interview with author, February 2012

[10] Kimberly Kagan, *The Surge: A Military History* (New York: Encounter, 2009), is
particularly dismissive of the British performance in Iraq; it refers only to the problems to be
found in British led areas in Iraq (particularly Basra and Maysaan) without actually mentioning
British troops at all.

[11] Patrick Coburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr and the Fall of Iraq* (London: Faber and Faber,
2008), refers to the loss of British control of and withdrawal from Basra and examines the impact
that this had on the politics of Iraq as a whole. A more Anglo-centric view is given by Jack
Fairweather, *A War of Choice: The British in Iraq 2003-2009* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011),
which benefits from the extraordinary range of personal interviews conducted by Fairweather
with senior British officers and other senior observers of the British campaign in Iraq.

[12] See Ned Parker, "The Iraq We Left Behind: Welcome to the World's Next Failed
State," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2012) for a discussion of the political impact of the British
withdrawal from southern Iraq.

[13] Coburn, *Muqtada Al-Sadr*, 245.

[14] For an example of a single news story illustrating almost all of these trends see B.B.C.
News, "UK troops begin Iraq withdrawal," B.B.C.,
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7973403.stm (accessed April 21, 2013).

It will do so through an examination of three British campaigns of the post-World War two period – the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), the Kenya Emergency (otherwise known as the Mau Mau Campaign, 1952-1960) and the Aden Emergency (more aptly described as the South Arabia Campaign, 1963-1967).[15] The logic underpinning the selection of these campaigns and the non-selection of others (particularly Northern Ireland) will be examined presently.

Methodology

This work looks to answer two questions. Why were the expectations for the performance of British forces in a COIN campaign so high? Why did British military performance not meet these expectations? The answer to these questions will then inform a potential answer to a third question – what should we learn and what should we do about it?

The monograph will examine three campaigns. These three campaigns have been chosen because they represent a broad spectrum of the post-war British colonial COIN experience. The Malayan Emergency is chosen because it is often held to be the supreme example of an effective COIN campaign and of the British approach to COIN in particular. (This approach, which can be summarized as civilian primacy, a strict adherence to a legal framework, the use of minimum/minimal levels of force will hereafter be referred to as the "British approach to COIN" or more simply, the "British approach".[16]) The Kenyan Emergency is chosen because it illustrates certain often unarticulated habits within the British approach to COIN and serves as a useful counterpoint to the near contemporary Malayan campaign. The Aden Emergency and South Arabian campaign (examined as a single case study) is chosen because it represents a

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[15] This work echoes heavily (albeit unknowingly) the work done by David French on British Counterinsurgency during the period 1945-1967. See David French, *The British Way in Counterinsurgency, 1945-67* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). The author is grateful to Professor Daniel Marston for guiding him to French's work, which helped refine the ideas presented here.

[16] For a particularly eloquent description of the British approach to COIN, see Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency,* Chapter Four.

British failure and is frequently ignored by those constructing a British COIN narrative. The monograph will examine only three of the campaigns within the canon of British COIN experience. There are a number of important omissions which might be profitably studied, including the campaigns waged in Palestine, Greece, Cyprus, and Northern Ireland. Each of these cases would add significantly to the depth of this monograph and would highlight the broad trends that will be identified within the "British approach to COIN." These trends – namely the frequent use of force, the relatively slow pace of learning and adaption and the limited range of historical case studies examined by the British Army and historians, suggest a more nuanced assessment of the "British COIN approach" is required. They are omitted due to reasons of space and the availability of access to the required source material. Similarly, while an examination of the colonial COIN campaign fought against the Moplah Rebellion and the techniques of colonial policing illustrated by the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre would also add to the arguments developed here, space precludes its inclusion.[17]

This monograph will provide an overview of each campaign selected, examining the differences between the accepted narratives and the historical record in each case, to identify why the British were expected to perform so well in Iraq and to seek to identify any underlying cause of the failure of the British military performance in Iraq to match these expectations. These overviews will develop the idea that British success owes much to methods which are ignored by the traditional narratives. The secondary and supporting idea that the British record of success is

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[17] The Moplah Revolt was a short, brutal and rapidly suppressed uprising against British rule in India by the Muslim community of Malabar which occurred from 1921-1922. It was put down by the British with significant loss of life amongst the local population. A fine introduction to the subject can be found in Conrad Wood, *The Moplah Rebellion and its Genesis* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1987). The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (more commonly known as the Amritsar Massacre) occurred in Amritsar in 1919, when Brigadier General Reginald Dyer dispersed a crowd of rioters using rifle fire. A good introduction to this topic can be found in Nigel Collett, *The Butcher of Amritsar: General Reginald Dyer* (London: Continuum Publishing, 2006).

in fact rather less uniform than the traditional narrative suggests, owing more to careful selection of case studies than to an unbroken record of success, will also be developed. Taken together these two arguments will be developed to suggest that the cause of the high British reputation for competency in COIN operations was built on shaky foundations – a combination of a self-projected image of competence and a failure to understand the true methodology behind what success was achieved.

The conclusion will seek to develop this assessment for its utility in evaluating recent operations. It will look to identify what lessons might be learned given a fresh examination of the historical record of British COIN operations, placed within their imperial context, for the modern soldier.

Defining the Terms of Debate

There is a requirement at this point to define the terms used in this monograph. The author believes that there is a clear distinction between the campaigns such as that fought by the Sri Lankan Government against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE), for example, and that fought by the British Government in Malaya against the Malayan Communist Party.[18] This distinction is that the British announced their intention to depart from Malaya as soon as the insurgency was defeated and that therefore the issue at hand was what the post-independence nation would look like, whereas for the Sri Lankan Government the question was the continued existence of the unitary state of Sri Lanka.[19] This author would argue that the Sri Lankans were

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[18] See David French, The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) for a discussion of this idea. The understanding of the nature of colonial COIN campaigning and the influence that colonial experience had on the nature and style of the post-World War Two British approach to COIN is an area which requires much work. The loss of the corporate memory of colonial war in the post-1967 period is of particular interest in understanding how the British approach to COIN developed. The author wishes to thank Professor D.P. Marston for his assistance in understanding this point.

[19] See M.R. Narayan Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2003), for a discussion of the ruthless nature of the LTTE and

fighting a true COIN campaign whereas the British were conducting a "decolonization" campaign – the differences in terms of acceptable tactics and outcomes are significant.[20] This is an idea which is developed in the concluding part of this monograph.

The author would also argue that there is also a clear distinction between a campaign fought by a non-indigenous imperial power that wishes to retain a position of dominance within a colonial society and one which is seeking simply to orchestrate a "politically stage-managed military withdrawal after the establishment of an acceptable post-colonial regime backed by an effective post-colonial security force."[21] Traditionally the British defined an acceptable post-colonial regime as one whose foreign policy was acceptable to the United Kingdom and largely ignored the question of internal policies. This approach might well have proved successful in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

The new British approach required nation building, as it desired the design of a nation along certain fixed, pre-ordained lines (democracy, human rights and so on), rather than its natural evolution. This is an altogether more demanding requirement. Thus it might usefully be argued that while decolonization (and the situations that the United States and the United Kingdom have found themselves in in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001 fit the definition of decolonization above) requires the control of certain aspects of a new nation only, true COIN requires nation maintaining, a distinction which is important.

Similarly either creating or inheriting an instant "failed state" also requires nation building in a manner which is distinct from the demands created by a true COIN campaign. The

the very real threat it posed to the existence of the Sri Lankan state. C. Christine Fair, *Urban Battlefields of South Asia: Lessons Learned from Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2004), offers a similar, if less emotional, examination of the same subject.

[20] Other decolonization campaigns that might be examined include the Portuguese campaign in Mozambique and the French in Algeria.

[21] Andrew Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth: British Irregular Warfare in the Post-War Era* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), 3.

historical approach adopted by the British has concentrated on ensuring an acceptable post-colonial state, while the approach in Iraq and Afghanistan (at least at first) sought to create an ideal state.[22] This argument is developed both during the overview and in the conclusion of this monograph.

These arguments would require a monograph of their own to fully explore. To avoid getting off topic, therefore, the term COIN will be used to cover the broad range of operations conducted by the British in the case studies examined.

The Historical Record of the British Army in COIN Campaigns

"Counterinsurgency assumed a status during the twentieth century as one of the British military's *fortes*."[23] This section of the monograph tackles that belief, so widely-held and asserted.[24] The British Army certainly accumulated a wealth of experience in a colonial setting during the twentieth century, especially during the period after World War Two. The shorthand for this experience, as noted above, is frequently COIN. In some cases, particularly those which are most frequently studied or commented on, they achieved a reasonable level of success. Generally included in these successful campaigns include Malaya, Northern Ireland, and the British experiences in the Balkans.[25] This section will examine the record of the British Army during the post-war period and propose the view that the historical record shows that this success

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[22] Interestingly the American approach has always been to aim for the ideal and then adjust downwards as the difficulties of achieving it becomes clear; both the Philippines and Vietnam offer examples of this. Professor Daniel Marston, interview with the author, February 2012.

[23] Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, 1.

[24] A good example of this trend can be found in the works of Thomas Mockaitis and John Nagl. See especially Mockaitis, *The Iraq War,* 11-19 and Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup,* 11.

[25] Mockaitis, *The Iraq War,* 11, 13-14. It is worth noting that the experiences that the British Army took into Afghanistan and Iraq were of peacekeeping tours in the Balkans and the post-Good Friday Agreement period of Op BANNER; neither of these experiences offered particularly useful foundations for a campaign that would look rather more like Londonderry in 1972.

was far from all-encompassing and was heavily reliant on what today would be termed a "kinetic approach"[26] and a very careful approach to selecting which historical cases would become part of the corporate memory.

Three campaigns are examined – the Malayan Emergency, the Kenyan Emergency and the South Arabia campaign – as a broad representative of the post-war British COIN experience (see above). It will be suggested that a review of the British performance in COIN campaigns in the post-war period suggests a mixed record of performance and a patchwork of different approaches. Furthermore (and perhaps more importantly) it will suggest that when success was achieved it was frequently done so by the use of techniques and approaches which are often regarded as being the antithesis of "the British Approach." The question of why, if this is the case, the British were able to develop a reputation for such competence in COIN operations is then posed. The monograph will also examine the secondary (but linked) issue of why this reputation was linked to an operational approach which was not reflected in the historical record.

The Malayan Emergency

The Malayan Emergency, which lasted from 1948-60, was fought between the British-led Government of Malaya and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) and its military branch, the Malayan People's Anti-British Army (MPABA: later renamed the Malayan Races Liberation Army, MRLA).[27] The MCP, a Chinese-dominated political party, had been active in Malaya

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[26] The rise of the term "Kinetic" within the British Army to describe operations in which people get killed is one of the most extraordinary features of the last decade. That the British Army, so long the master of understatement, should turn to a management speak euphemism to describe violence, is probably worthy of a study of its own. The author preferred the previous euphemism – "Cheeky."

[27] The "Emergency" was a legal distinction used by the British to provide a legal mechanism within which to conduct what would now be termed COIN campaigns. Although best known for its use in Malaya it was used in all the case studies covered in this monograph. A state

since before World War Two, with limited success. During World War Two it was co-opted by the British to serve as part of a broad anti-Japanese alliance and it received weapons and training from the British. At the end of World War Two it was voluntarily disarmed and its leader, Chin Peng, was decorated by the British.[28] The MCP returned to obscurity, from which it was rescued by the failure of the Malayan Union Plan, which the British had intended to use to bring equal rights to the Chinese and Indian populations of Malaya.[29] The Plan was fiercely opposed by the ethnic Malay leadership and was abandoned. The failure of the Malayan Union Plan illustrates the fact that British rule in Malaya was indirect. Contrary to the opinion often expressed, the British did not "own" Malaya. Their actions there were limited by that which was acceptable to the population.[30] The abandonment of the Malayan Union Plan, coupled with the instructions from the Communist Information Bureau (COMINFORM)[31] at the Calcutta Youth Conference of

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of "Emergency" could only be called in a Crown Colony for which the British monarch had direct sovereignty and direct authority to amend the powers of the local executive, legislature, and judiciary. One additional benefit (particularly to British colonists) was that it allowed civilians to claim insurance for attacks against their property as it classified the violence as "terrorism" or "banditry" rather than an act of war, which would have been excluded by most insurance policies. Truly, as Napoleon commented, the British are a nation of shopkeepers. An Emergency gave the local government powers to remove certain rights from the population (e.g. a suspension of habeas corpus or the removal of the right to strike) for an indefinite period of time in order to address the threat from political violence. It was understood that such measures would be temporary and not permanent. A very British solution to the problems faced.

[28] Chin Peng was a pre-war Chinese social activist and Communist, who served with distinction as a leader of the MPAJA during World War. He was awarded an O.B.E. by the British for his war service and then returned to Communist politics after the failure of the Malayan Union Experiment. For further details see Chin Peng, *My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003).

[29] For an examination of the Malayan Union Plan see A. J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment, 1942-1948* (Kuala Lumpar: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (Monograph No.8), 1979).

[30] The author experienced this tendency to misunderstand the nature of British rule in Malaya during a discussion with the Director of SAMS, January 2013. The idea that the British were free actors in Malaya is enduring and remarkably difficult to correct.

[31] More correctly the Information Bureau of the Communist and Workers Parties.

February 1948, drove the MCP to an active military campaign against the British-led

government.[32]

This campaign was initially successful, rendering significant parts of the country

ungovernable and allowing the further growth of the MCP. The insurgency was aided by a slow

British response. [33] From 1950 onwards, after the appointment of Lieutenant General Sir Harold

Briggs as the Director of Operations with overall responsibility for countering the insurgency, and

especially following the appointment of General Sir Gerald Templer as the High Commissioner

in 1952, the British were able to stem the tide of the insurgency. The British were able to

mobilize the population in support of their efforts (aided by the failure of the MCP to broaden its

ethnic appeal) and defeat the insurgency. This in turn enabled the handover of power to an

independent, ethnic Malayan government on Merdeka Day in 1957.

The overall pattern of the insurgency is generally regarded as being one of early MCP

success culminating in the murder of Sir Henry Gurney (the British High Commissioner to

Malaya) before the British (adapting in contact) were able to conduct a model COIN campaign

and achieve victory.[34] The salient features of this narrative form the basis of the "British

Approach". These features include a clear political aim, the requirement that government forces

act in accordance with the law, the requirement for the government to have and act in accordance

with an overall plan, the requirement for the government to give priority to defeating political

subversion rather than the military element of the insurgency, and the requirement in the guerilla

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[32] For a detailed description of the background to the Malayan Emergency see Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, 26-27.

[33] Although there were significant Commonwealth forces involved in the Malayan Emergency Campaign, this monograph will use the term "British" to cover all non-indigenous counter-insurgent forces active during the campaign.

[34] For an example of this narrative, see Noel Barber, *The War of the Running Dogs: How Malaya Defeated the Communist Guerillas 1948-1960* (London: Collins, 1971).

phase of the insurgency for the government to secure its base areas first. They were articulated by Sir Robert Thompson and have remained largely unquestioned ever since.[35] The validity of this narrative will now be considered.

Competing Narratives – Competing Truths – Context is King

The Malayan Emergency Campaign is "widely considered to be the first modern counter-insurgency"[36] and is described by many modern COIN theorists as being an example of how to conduct such operations.[37] This is perhaps the dominant narrative of the campaign, which sets the conditions for the modern perception of the campaign as a model for current operations. In this narrative an operational approach built on the simultaneous use of military, intelligence, local and political means, within a tightly controlled legal framework, with civil primacy over the military, offers a model for success. This narrative was enthusiastically promulgated by those who had played a key role in the campaign (such as Sir Robert Thompson[38]) and was enthusiastically received, both at the time and in the present day by politicians who found themselves confronted with similar entanglements and by military officers who found the Malayan narrative a useful starting point for the development of their own ideas.[39]

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[35] See Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency,* 50-58.

[36] Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth,* 25.

[37] Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup,* particularly xxi-xxv. The power of this narrative on senior officers can be seen from the foreword to this book by General Peter J. Schoomaker. It is also illustrated by the suggestion in FM 3-24 that Malaya "provides lessons applicable to countering any insurgency." See Department of the Army, *FM 3-24: US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 235.

[38] Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 50-58.

[39] Although John Nagl is the most prominent example of this trend it can be argued that

This is a very acceptable narrative to modern eyes, and it suggests an operational

approach which is similarly acceptable. Such an operational approach is perhaps a good one. It

is certainly the basis of modern COIN doctrine, both within the United Kingdom and the United

States.[40] A reassessment of the historical record does raise some interesting questions as to the

utility of Malaya as a model. These questions fall into three broad categories. First there is the

question of whether or not Malaya is a suitable case study from which to build a model, given the

peculiar circumstances that governed the campaign. These fell across a number of different areas.

The Emergency was conducted during an economic boom.[41] A series of external events ensured

widespread external support for the counter-insurgents.[42] The same events limited the availability

of external support for the insurgents.[43] The ethnicity of the insurgents limited the appeal of the

insurgents to the wider population.[44] The insurgents failed to apply the tactics of guerrilla war.[45]

The British had at the time of the Emergency been present in Malaya for over a hundred years

which perhaps eased some of their cultural difficulties with parts of the local population.[46]

David Kilcullen and General David Petraeus also fall into this category.

[40] For an example of this see *FM 3-24*, April 2009, particularly Chapter 3, Sections 1,2, and 4.

[41] See Correlli Barnett, *Lost Victory*: *British Dreams, British Realities, 1945-1950* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 82-87, 369 for the economic status of Malaya and the impact of the Korean War.

[42] See Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, 46-47 for a discussion of the impact of the Korean War on the Malayan Emergency; Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency,* 13-17, 21-27 for a description and statement of the broad anti-Communist sentiment which aided the British in Malaya.

[43] Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, 25, 27, 45.

[44] Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004), 126.

[45] John Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002), 43.

Finally the ability of the British – the counter insurgent – to remove the main rallying point of the insurgents by granting Malaya independence perhaps limits the utility of Malaya as a model.[47] It is worth noting that the uniqueness of Malaya was widely noted in the immediate aftermath of the campaign and at least some notable protagonists warned against using it as a role model for future COIN campaigns.[48]

These conditions raise two further issues. The first is the intriguing nature of the Malayan Emergency. There can be little doubt that the British, in the form of the Government of Malaya (GoM), represented the accepted legally-constituted government of Malaya that the MCP was seeking to overthrow by the use of violence. In this sense it was clearly a COIN campaign. However the fact must be acknowledged that from a very early stage of the campaign, the British articulated their desire to transfer power to an acceptable form of Malayan self-government within the Commonwealth. This concession had the effect of both undermining the insurgents and altering the nature of the Emergency. [49] The British were thus trying to create an environment in which they would be able to withdraw from Malaya successfully, create a nation to take their place and which would remain sympathetic to British interests, while stopping others from building a nation which would not be sympathetic to British interests, all simultaneously. When examined in this light, it may appear to have more relevance to the campaign in Iraq than at first appears to be the case.

The British had entered the Emergency in a difficult position. In the eyes of the

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[46] Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup*, xiii

[47] As Sir Robert Thompson pointed out "Chin Peng started a war to kick out the British Imperialists – and now there aren't any. We've not been kicked out – we've left, head high, and it's the British who gave Independence to Malaya, not Chin Peng." Quoted in, Noel Barber, *War of the Running Dogs* (London: Cassell, 2007), 235.

[48] See Major Sergio Miller, "Malaya: Myth of Hearts and Mind" in *British Army Review* (Winter 2012/13), 33-41.

[49] Sir Robert Thompson, quoted in Barber, *War of the Running Dogs*, 235.

population of Malaya the reputation and credibility of the British were still recovering from the

debacle of the loss of Malaya to the Japanese during 1941-42. The failure of the Malayan Union

experiment had served to both undermine British credibility with the Malay States and to

embolden the MCP who felt, not unreasonably, that the interests of the Chinese population were

likely to be accorded a low priority by both the British as they sought to alleviate the complaints

of the Malay majority and any future Malay-dominated indigenous government. Thus the

assessment of the MCP that the British were unlikely to remain firm in the face of a significant

challenge to their authority seemed reasonable. It was this widely-held belief that the British had

to counter first, especially in the aftermath of the early failures of British forces.

In the House of Commons Attlee made it clear repeatedly that the British would stay the

It seems reasonable to argue that the Labour Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, understood

that in order to defeat the insurgency and enable a Malaya acceptable to Britain to emerge, two

things needed to be made clear to the Malayan people. The first of these was that the British

would stay the course militarily and the second was that they would begin the process of

decolonization as soon as it was possible to do so. Professor A. J. Stockwell (perhaps the pre-

eminent modern writer on the Malayan Emergency) argues that it was the return to power of

Churchill and the Conservatives in 1951 that was the key to victory. [50] This monograph would

argue that it was in fact the ability of Attlee to follow the maxim of Clausewitz and identify what

type of campaign in which he was engaged – one that could only be concluded by the withdrawal

of British troops and the ending of British rule.

In the House of Commons Attlee made it clear repeatedly that the British would stay the

course. He declared on April 13 1949, for example, that "His Majesty's Government has no

intention of relinquishing their responsibilities in Malaya until their task is completed… We have

no intention in jeopardizing the security, well-being and liberty of these peoples, for whom

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[50] A.J. Stockwell, "British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya, 1942-52",
Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 13 (1984), 70.

Britain responsibilities, by a premature withdrawal."[51] The essential point here is not that the British were not going to leave, but rather that they would do so on their own terms and only after a military victory had been achieved. The fact that it took the announcement of the British departure (planned for August 31, 1957) to defeat the political aspect of the insurgency, even after its military defeat in 1955, illustrates this.

This secure transfer of power raises some interesting points. The first suggests that if performance in Malaya was to be taken as a guide, the British should have performed well in Iraq, which, like Malaya, saw a simultaneous requirement to create a post-colonial regime favorable to the British, to stop others from building an alternative nation, and to create conditions under which a successful withdrawal could occur. The second area of interest is the question of whether the conditions needed to allow a secure transfer of power (namely the support of the ethnic Malay population) undermined the stated aims of the British. The post-independence settlement did not reflect the aims of the Malayan Union Experiment. Post-independence Malaya would be an avowedly Malay state. To this extent it can be argued that the insurgency was counterproductive. Arguably it forced the British to accept a settlement that was less equable than they would have wished. Despite defeating the insurgency the British can hardly be held to have succeeded in achieving their pre-Emergency aims. Once again the experience of Malaya should have been a boon for the United Kingdom in the Iraq campaign, highlighting as it did the importance of compromise, accommodation, and the use of allies to achieve political ends.

The second area where the Malayan campaign offers useful areas for study is whether the approach adopted by the British actually matches that articulated by the traditional narrative. The accepted narrative of Malaya stresses the importance of the legal approach, the importance of

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[51] Hansard, Volume 463 – 1948-49, 21 Mar-14 April (13 Apr) Column 2815.

"soft power,"[52] and the limited use of force, used carefully and selectively. For example, while the British were careful to ensure that they set up a legal framework for their actions in Malaya, historians and COIN theorists frequently equate this to a belief that British actions were somehow constrained by legal processes. This perceived constraint is often compared with the less careful approach adopted by the United States in Vietnam.[53]

This attitude does not grant sufficient weight to two factors. The first is the special ability of the British in Malaya to put in place extraordinary legislation, an ability which is typically not available to modern counter-insurgents. The second is the remarkable nature of the sort of emergency legislation used by the colonial authorities to support their harsher tactics. The Case of Emergency Regulation 17D (hereafter 17D) illustrates this. When it was enacted in January 1949, it allowed for both mass detentions without trial and population relocation programs. As a result of 17D, 29,829 people were imprisoned without trial. Further regulations allowed for mass deportation, secret trials, and the right to register the entire population and issue identity cards. Together, these regulations essentially enabled the British to turn the whole of Malaya into a police state. The state executed 226 members of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) for activities against British or Malayan security forces.[54]

The British also used less formal methods of judicial execution. Regulation 27A allowed the British to shoot to kill any person they suspected of attempting to escape from their custody,

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[52] For a further example of this narrative, see Rob Thornton, "The British Army and the Origins of its Minimum Force Philosophy," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 15 (2004) and Susan L. Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and Colonial Counter-Insurgency, 1944-1960* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995).

[53]Perhaps the best example of this intellectual tendency is Aylwin-Foster, "Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations" *Military Review* (November-December 2005), 2-15.

[54] For a discussion of the design, application and implications of Regulation 17D see: Anthony Short, *The Communist Insurgency in Malaya, 1948-60* (London: Frederick Muller, 1975); Barber, *War of the Running Dogs*; Newsinger, *British Counterinsurgency*;and Philip Deery, "The Terminology of Terrorism: Malaya, 1948-52, " *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 34 (2003) 246.

which could be interpreted as the commander on the ground saw fit.[55] Given broad scope of these

powers it is unclear what additional powers those members of the European community in

Malaya who called for the imposition of martial law could have had in mind. In stark contrast to

the historical narrative, the historical record suggests that that the British approach to COIN

operations is characterized by an extremely thorough use of coercion, violence, and brutality

within a clearly understood intellectual and legal framework.

Such disingenuous methods perhaps had a number of additional effects. Amongst these

may have been an increase in the willingness to consider exemplary, non-judicial punishment of

suspected insurgents. When a regulation is put in place in order to retrospectively legalize the

murder of 24 persons by British troops, this would appear to make murder a reasonable action for

other British troops.[56] This would be entirely in keeping with the arguments made by Omer

Bartov that a breakdown in the moral values of a military force, once begun, rapidly increases and

becomes increasingly difficult to arrest.[57] It also might explain why the British forces operating

in Malaya were quite so keen to brutalize the Chinese population there. That this occurred and

that it was essentially sanctioned by the British authorities is illustrated by this assessment by Sir

Henry Guerny:

> [T]errorists can be defeated only by the initiative being taken by the Police and other
> security forces against the terrorists on their own ground and according to their own
> rules. This offensive action against civilian members of the community, not always

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[55] For Regulation 27A see CO 717/167/3: Federation of Malaya, Regulations made under The Emergency Regulations Ordinance, 1948, together with The Essential (Special Constabulary) Regulations, 1948, incorporating all Amendments made up to the 22nd March, 1949 (Kuala Lumpur: Government Printer 1949). For a discussion of the truly extraordinary nature of this legislation, which made acts which were illegal before it came into force retrospectively legal see Huw Bennett, "'A very salutary effect': The Counter-Terror Strategy in the Early Malayan Emergency, June 1948 to December 1949" *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32, 3, 415- 444.

[56] Huw Bennett, "'A Very Salutary Effect'," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32, 3, 431-434.

[57] Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

clearly distinguishable, raises most difficult questions of law. It is in fact impossible to maintain the rule of law and to fight terrorism

effectively at the same time. I have publicly said that it is paradoxical though none the less true that in order to maintain law and order in present conditions in Malaya it is necessary for the Government itself to break it for a time. . . . At the present time the Police and Army are breaking the law every day. A spate of Emergency Regulations to provide legal cover could if necessary be issued, but to give the sanctity of law to pieces of paper signed by the High Commissioner only and not subject to ratification by any legislature must lead, if taken too far, to justified criticism and misconceptions derogatory of the law itself. . . . it is most important that police and soldiers, who are not saints, should not get the impression that every small mistake is going to be the subject of a public enquiry or that it is better to do nothing at all than to do the wrong thing quickly. . . . The process of isolation of the 'hard core' can only be permanently successful if some alternative object of affiliation, stronger than the bandits and at the same time inspiring greater fear, can be introduced to which the floating Chinese can attach themselves. [58]

A number of points of worth are raised by the passage above. The first is the idea that it is impossible to fight terrorism within the rule of law. The second is the acceptance that the British used the law to legalize what were in essence illegal acts. The third is the ready acceptance that troops involved in COIN operations would behave in a brutal fashion. The final idea is the most important – the link between fear and an alternative, non-Communist, affiliation. These ideas do not fit with the traditional narrative of the "British Approach" but they certainly appear to lay the foundations for it.

The number of instances of atrocities documented in the secondary literature on the Malayan Campaign is relatively small. There is evidence that atrocities did take place (of which the most famous is the Batang Kali massacre of December 11 1948)[59] and some commentators seem to suggest that it was far from an exceptional case.[60] Huw Bennett argues that in the early

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[58] CO 537/4753: Statement by the High Commissioner for Malaya, Annexure 'A' to minutes of the 16th meeting of the BDCC (FE), January 28 1949, quoted in Bennett, "A Very Salutary Effect," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 441.

[59]The Batang Kali Massacre was the most infamous excessive use of force by the British in Malaya. It occurred in Batang Kali, Selangor, in December 1948, when a patrol from 2nd Battalion The Scots Guards shot dead 24 suspects, who apparently tried to escape. Their actions became retrospectively legal thanks to Regulation 27A.

part of the campaign "the evidence demonstrates how a contempt for the Chinese squatters combined with intelligence failure to produce a policy in favour of punishing an entire population."[61] Furthermore, he also suggests that this approach was not the actions of a few outliers but rather a planned and systematic approach. However, while he argues that this was counterproductive and significantly altered later in the campaign, this monograph argues that the substance of the British operational approach in Malaya did not alter. If this argument is correct then the sanitizing of the record of the Emergency is sanitized to eliminate the harsh methods used, then the student seeking lessons from the British experience is profoundly handicapped. This idea will now be developed.

The Briggs Plan[62] was designed to cut the insurgents off from their natural supporters – the Chinese squatter population.[63] By doing so it would weaken the MCP/Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA).[64] This would allow for a greater concentration of forces by the British.[65] Simultaneously it would allow for the development of new intelligence mechanisms.[66]

[60] Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Wars: The End of Britain's Asian Empire* (London: Allen Lane 2007), 449–53.

[61] Bennett, *Salutary Effect*, 441. The author is also grateful to Professor Marston for highlighting the traditional nature of this policy, which had been used to good effect in the North West Frontier Province, Palestine and in India in 1947 (with the approval of Congress and the League). Marston, interview with author, April 2013.

[62] Lieutenant General Sir Harold Briggs was appointed as Director of Operations in Malaya in April 1950. He developed the eponymous plan with the intention of separating the MCP/MRLA from its natural constituency, the landless Chinese squatter population. To this end he devised a significant population resettlement program, which saw a large part of the ethnic Chinese population rehoused in the government protected and controlled "New Villages". For a description of the Briggs Plan and its overall role in the defeat of the insurgency, see Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup*, 71-72.

[63] Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth,* 46.

[64] John Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency: An Analysis of the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1954* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 87.

[65] Ibid, 93.

A secondary effect would be the cooption of the Chinese population into British and Malay security institutions on a wider scale than before.[67] Taken as a whole these measures would allow for the application of British government and Government of Malaya policy over a wider segment of the population.[68] All of these aims are vital in a counter-insurgency campaign and have correctly been absorbed into modern COIN doctrine.[69] The essential part that coercion and violence by the British played in achieving these aims is largely ignored. The tenure of Templar would not have been as successful without the Briggs Plan; the Briggs Plan could not be made to work without force. At the bottom line, it was force which enabled the separation of the MCP/MRLA from the landless Chinese squatter population – the only part of the Malayan demographic they were well placed to win over.

The final point that needs to be raised is the length of time that it took the British to "get it." Many very successful techniques were developed, particularly with regard to the importance of intelligence collection and the employment of a coercive and heavily politicized hearts and minds process. It took time to develop these techniques, tactics and procedures.[70] While this in itself does not call into question the value of Malaya as a blueprint, it does raise questions over the idea of British competence. Twelve years to defeat a small, unpopular and ethnically-distinct rebel group does not seem to be the mark of competence, especially given that the far larger

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[66] Brian Stewart, "Winning in Malaya – An Intelligence Success Story," *Intelligence and National Security*, 14, (1999): 199, 276.

[67] Coates, *Suppressing Insurgency*, 114.

[68] Kumar Ramakrishina, "'Transmogrifying' Malaya: The Impact of Sir Gerald Templer (1952-54)", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies,* 32 (2001): 79.

[69] Although, as Sir Hew Strachan notes, "the Americans… more than the British, have held Malaya up as a model" see Hew Strachan, "British Counter-Insurgency from Malaya to Iraq", *RUSI Journal,* 152 (2007): 8, quoted in Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth,* 47.

[70]Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth,* 40; Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup,* 93.

Moplah Revolt was defeated within two years. Perhaps the Malayan Emergency set a new

paradigm for COIN operations with the rapid approach favored by colonial powers being

replaced with a longer approach? The idea that COIN must take a long time is certainly dominant

at present – but it is based on studies which consider post-World War Two conflicts only. This

lack of historical depth is concerning. It is perhaps an example of the perils of allowing social

scientists to discuss areas that ought to be reserved for historians.[71]

Assessing British Performance in the Malayan Campaign

An objective review of the Malayan Campaign in the light of the two questions posed by

this monograph would therefore have to raise three main points. The first of these is the Malayan

Emergency's continued applicability as a model for decolonization and nation-building in the

face of an insurgent threat. The British understood that the only way they could conclude the

campaign was by both departing from Malaya and by abandoning their pre-Emergency positions,

and this led them to adopt a highly successful political approach, based on compromise and the

use of local allies. The second point is the actual techniques that underpinned this approach and

the variance between them and the traditional narrative. The British approach saw the ruthless

and deliberate use of force and brutality against one part of the population in particular, while

they backed another ethnic group politically, whilst pushing the need for reconciliation onto both

parties. This was successful. By 1960 many of the issues that had caused the Union Plan to fail

had been resolved in favor of the Chinese community, as the ethnic Malays realized that such an

approach was required if they were to guarantee the long-term stability of Malaya. The British

approach in Malaya was a layered strategy, with much nuance. The vital part that violence

played in the campaign, however, is largely ignored by the traditional narrative.

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[71] See Ben Connable and Martin C. Libicki, *How Insurgencies End* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2010) and Christopher Paul and Colin P. Clarke, "Evidentiary Validation of FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency Worldwide, 1978-2008," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 60, (2011): 126-128. The earliest case study considered by either of these works is the Chinese Civil War.

Kenya

A Short Summary of the Kenyan Emergency

The Mau-Mau[72] revolt against British rule in Kenya broke out in 1952 and it was largely defeated by 1956, although it endured in parts until 1960.[73] The Mau-Mau, a militant movement that was an offshoot of Kikuyu tribalism, launched an extremely violent campaign against the British-led government and its Kenyan (particularly Black African Kenyan) allies. This was defeated by the British-led government after a campaign which used the full range of British colonial COIN tools.

The Mau-Mau campaign is, for reasons that will be discussed below, an oft ignored part of Britain's retreat from empire. When it is examined, the narrative developed is fundamentally similar to the narrative of Malaya. Both featured an insurgency launched by an ethnically distinct group within British Kenya, which took advantage of early British unpreparedness and enjoyed initial success. The British once again adapt in contact, develop a legal framework for action and act within it, show particular innovation in terms of their development of intelligence and psychological operations and are able, having coopted the majority of the indigenous population to their side to defeat the insurgency, to allow a smooth transition to independence.

The exact nature of the Mau-Mau and the groups exact aims are still a subject of considerable debate. To an extent this serves to place it outside the mainstream narrative of the British withdrawal from empire or the canon of British COIN experience. Because the origins, course and outcome of the Mau-Mau campaign cannot be summarized in a short, simple narrative (unlike the Malayan Emergency for example) any examination of the subject is fraught with

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[72] An example of the complicated nature of the Mau-Mau is given by their nomenclature. This text will refer to the "Mau-Mau", except when quoting from works which refes to the "Mau Mau."

[73] WO 236/20, Order of the Day, Lathbury, November 13 1956; see also Mumford, *The Counterinsurgency Myth,* 71.

difficulties. One example of this problem is the confused nature of the Mau-Mau themselves. Were they a nihilist movement determined to return Kenya to pre-colonial circumstances, a savage and uncoordinated movement whose purpose was violence (as the British argued), a part of an intra-Kikuyu tribal struggle, or heroic freedom fighters seeking to liberate their country? This is important because if modern doctrine is to be informed by historical case studies then it is important to understand the nature of those cases. Understanding the Mau-Mau is not easy to do.

This confusion is deepened by two further factors. The first is the politicization of the Mau-Mau in post-colonial Kenya, where they remain an issue of considerable political sensitivity. As Daniel Branch has written, "[T]he history of the anti-colonial rebellion was largely silenced in national debate in Kenya during the presidencies of Jomo Kenyatta (1963–1978) and Daniel arap Moi (1978–2002). The war was too contradictory to be claimed by the new nation-state as one of national liberation after independence in 1963."[74] Mumford goes as far as saying that "[T]heir intentions, like the movement as a whole, remained porous, ensuring that the Mau-Mau was concomitantly labeled reformist, nationalist, anti-colonial and Kikuyu supremacist."[75] The difficulties in defining the Mau-Mau were made harder by the nature of their campaign, which targeted at various times white settlers, the military and political authorities, other Kikuyu and other tribes.

This confusion has had a number of effects. First it means that the examination of the Mau-Mau, particularly by Kenyan sources, has tended to either not exist or to be extremely politicized. Secondly it means that the nature of the war that the British fought against them has largely been ignored by those responsible for creating the idea of the British approach to COIN.

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[74] Daniel J. Branch, *Defeating Mau Mau, Creating Kenya: Counterinsurgency, Civil War, and Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), xi. The same arguments are raised by Bruce J. Berman in Bruce J. Berman, "Nationalism, Ethnicity and Modernity: The Paradox of the Mau Mau," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 25 (1991): 181-206.

[75] Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, 51.

This section will examine the nature of that campaign and what the historical record of British performance in Kenya suggests about the utility of the model of the British approach to COIN and the idea of British competence in COIN operations.

It is first necessary to examine what the Mau-Mau were and where they emerged from, both in terms of geography and history. As has already been discussed this is an area shrouded in confusion; what follows is sufficient to allow the reader to engage with the arguments that will be developed but no more.

The Mau-Mau grew out of the politicization of the Kikuyu tribe.[76] This in turn was caused by the pressures placed on traditional Kikuyu life by a growth in their population during the 1920s and the seizure (through legal but immoral methods) of much of their traditional land holdings by White settlers. The Kikuyu were transformed by this process from free landholders to tenant farmers, largely reliant on their employers for their continued existence.[77] This led to both an increased militancy amongst the Kikuyu and a move towards urban centers, which was to have implications during the campaign.[78] The main focus of this increased polarization and militancy was the Kikuyu Central Association (KCU) which grew in influence and was eventually banned by the British authorities in 1940 as a threat to colonial rule and a potential

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[76] For an overview of the background to the Kenya Emergency, including the ethnic, social and political factors which created the Mau-Mau see Berman, op. cit.

[77] Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, 50.

[78] The move to urban areas of Kikuyu political leaders meant that the British found it easier to execute a decapitation strategy against the Mau-Mau when the State of Emergency was declared. This had two separate and unsought results; first it created sympathy for the Mau-Mau amongst the Kenyan population that had initially been absent and secondly it removed many of the moderate Mau-Mau leaders from positions of influence within the organization. See John Newsinger, "Minimum Force, British Counter-Insurgency and the Mau-Mau Rebellion," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 3 (1992) and Donald L. Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau from Within: Autobiography and Analysis of Kenya's Peasant Revolt* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1966),72, quoted in Mumford, *The Counterinsurgency Myth*, 53. For a discussion of the importance of urban centers in Kenya to the Mau-Mau see David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (London: Orion, 2006),200.

block on recruitment of Kenyans into imperial forces. It morphed into and was succeeded by the

Kenya African Union (KAU) which grew rapidly under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta and was,

on the whole, a relatively moderate nationalist movement which sought to develop itself into a

viable mass movement seeking independence from the United Kingdom. Elements of the radical

KCU remained within the KAU and they continued to seek more radical action against the British

and importantly, against other non-Kikuyu elements within Kenyan society. It was from these

radical elements within the KAU that the more militant Mau-Mau was to emerge.[79] The Mau-

Mau (as they were to become) began to become an important element in Kenyan political life

from the late 1940s and were believed to be responsible for a number of violent but limited

actions against both the British settler community and non-Kikuyu elements of Kenyan society.

The nature of the Mau-Mau then, is extremely difficult to define. Despite the inability of

the British to define what the Mau-Mau actually was, membership of the Mau-Mau was

proscribed in August 1950, after an increase in the perceived level of Mau-Mau inspired violence

against the government. This did not end Mau-Mau violence and attacks against White settlers

and Kenyan loyalists increased through 1950-52. The increase in violence was matched by a

detachment on the part of the British authorities that is hard to comprehend.[80] For example,

despite the increasing violence, which fed considerable concerns amongst the settler community

and amongst the loyalists within the Black African Kenyan population, the Governor of Kenya,

Sir Philip Mitchell, did not declare a State of Emergency. It was not until the arrival of a new

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[79] R. Weigart, *Traditional Religion and Guerilla Warfare in Africa* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 22-24.

[80] This reluctance to act was not limited to the authorities in Kenya. The Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, observed on September 9 1952 in a telegram to the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, that he "did not take a very alarmist view of the situation in Kenya." PREM 11/472, "Telegram from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, O. Lyttelton to PM, 9 September 1952." It is possible that the ongoing Malayan Emergency may have led to reluctance to accept the evidence emerging from Kenya.

Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring, that a State of Emergency was declared on October 20 1952.

The British sought to decapitate the Mau-Mau after the State of Emergency was declared by the use of mass arrests. This wholesale incarceration of the "Mau-Mau leadership" was made harder by the fact that colonial authorities estimated that up to 90% of the Kikuyu population had taken at least one of the Mau-Mau oaths.[81] It appears possible that they were incorrect in this assessment and this error served to further complicate and hamper the British response to the Mau-Mau threat.[82] This technique proved unsuccessful (as it had been in Malaya and would be in Northern Ireland) and appears likely to have simply removed the moderate elements of the Kenyan Nationalist leadership (such as it was) from a position where they might have been able to influence the Mau-Mau leadership.[83]

The British efforts to characterize the Mau-Mau as "primeval savages" were more successful. This accusation stuck to the Mau-Mau in a way that the suggestion that the MCP were "bandits" never had. The reasons for this are intriguing. Included amongst them must be race, the savagery of Mau-Mau behavior towards other Black Africans and the nature of the Mau-Mau oaths. All of these combined to form an attitude toward the Mau-Mau that was to prove extremely useful to the British in facilitating their operational approach. The importance of race cannot be overstated. There can be little doubt that the White settler community in Kenya was racist in a way that the planter community in Malaya was not, and that these attitudes informed

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[81] For a description of Mau-Mau oaths and the part that they played in both creating the myth and potency of the Mau-Mau see: John Lonsdale, "Mau Maus of the Mind: Making the Mau Mau and Remaking Kenya," *Journal of African History* 31 (1990): 393-421.

[82] Caroline Elkins, *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (London: Pimlico, 2005), 27. It should be noted that the value of Elkins as a commentator is currently under question, with significant questions emerging over her methodology. Her work must be assessed in the light of this criticism.

[83] It is interesting to note the same complaints made by those responsible for promoting reconciliation and reintegration in Afghanistan in 2010-11. Lieutenant Colonel Phil Deans, Royal Signals, interview with the author, Washington DC, October 2013.

the conduct of the campaign.[84]

By framing the campaign as one fought against an almost nihilistic, primitive, savage enemy, whose rationale and motives were unclear, perhaps even to themselves, the British were able to conduct operations with "unprecedented ferocity."[85] Such were the levels of violence used by the British in combatting the Mau-Mau that Elkins refers to the methodology as being "state-sanctioned terror"[86] while Huw Bennett declares that "fear became a strategic level for combating the insurgency."[87]

It certainly was a nasty guerilla war. Just as the background and political aims of the Mau-Mau were unclear, so to was their military strategy. In fact it is fairer to talk of Mau-Mau strategies, as there is no evidence that the Mau-Mau leaders in the four main areas affected by the insurgency (the Aberdare Mountains, Mount Kenya, Nairobi, and the Kikuyu tribal reserve in the north of the country) ever coordinated their operational approaches with each other. In each of these areas the Mau-Mau were hampered by the fact that they possessed very little in terms of equipment, training, or experience (unlike the MPABA/MRLA). These two factors (the lack of a coherent aim and the lack of technical competence) go some way in explaining the generic Mau-Mau approach, which was to target unprotected White settlers or Kikuyu/Kenyan loyalists.[88]

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[84] One officer serving in Kenya was told by a White settler he encountered "You are from London and you don't know how to handle niggers. I do." See Michael Barber, *The Captain: The Life and Times of Simon Raven* (London: Duckworth, 1996), 147.

[85] Newsinger, "Minimum Force", 50. It is perhaps interesting to contrast the setting of the Kenyan Emergency within the moral framework of Mau-Mau savagery and the freedom of action that gave the British with the reluctance of the British to do the same thing in the Iraq campaign and the restrictions that casting themselves as liberators placed on their actions.

[86] Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, 73.

[87] Huw Bennett, "The Other Side of the COIN: Minimum and Exemplary Force in British Army Counterinsurgency in Kenya," *Small Wars and Insurgencies,* 18 (2007): 647.

[88] Evidence suggests that the Mau-Mau leaders felt no compunction about having started

They were rather good at this – as witnessed by the number of massacres they perpetrated during the campaign.[89] Interestingly the sheer violence of these actions served to assist the British. They enabled the British to highlight the "savage" nature of the enemy they were fighting (see above) and they forced the British to take the Mau-Mau seriously, as a result of settler anger. This anger was somewhat irrational as the prime target of the Mau-Mau was not the settler community – rather it was loyalist Kikuyu.[90] From July 1953 onwards, perhaps prompted by the continuing existence of the insurgency despite its supposed decapitation and by its continued ability to strike against White and loyalist Kenyan targets, the British developed a highly effective approach to countering the Mau-Mau threat which was to ensure its destruction in military terms by 1956. This approach will now be examined in detail.

Violent Subjugation and Torture – the COIN approach that dare not speak its name

There has historically been little discussion of the Kenyan Emergency, particularly when compared with the interest shown in the Malayan Emergency. General Sir Frank Kitson described the campaign as "a sideshow among sideshows"[91] and this appears to be a reasonable

a Kikuyu civil war, in which of necessity Kikuyu suffered most. During his interrogation by Special Branch, General China (a senior Mau-Mau) when asked why he had concentrated most of his energies on attacking his own tribe, responded that "If you want to go away in a car and find that the back tyre is punctured, you have to stop and mend it before you can go on." See: WO 276/512, Interrogation of Waruhiu s/o Itote, 26 January 1954" quoted in Mumford, *The Counterinsurgency Myth*, 67. See also Daniel Branch, "The Enemy Within: Loyalists and the War against the Mau Mau" *Journal of African History*, 48 (2007): 294.

[89] Perhaps the most brutal of these was the attack on March 26 1953 by the Mau-Mau against the loyalist Kikuyu village of Lari, which killed over 100 villagers and saw the destruction of their homes. The Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttleton acknowledged that the overwhelming weight of Mau-Mau atrocities was conducted against Black African Kenyans. Oliver Lyttleton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos* (London: Bodley Head, 1962), 397.

[90] Mumford suggests that 1,821 Kikuyu were killed during the campaign by the Mau-Mau compared with 32 White settlers. Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency* Myth, 65.

[91] Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 13. This work is probably the most widely read work on the Kenyan Emergency amongst British officers. It lays particular emphasis on the technical approach to intelligence operations by its author who later

assessment of the historical status of the campaign. When the campaign is examined the dominant narrative tends to concentrate on assessments of the innovative approaches to intelligence and psychological operations adopted by the British.[92] The physical and intellectual foundation for these operations – the widespread and systematic use of terror – is rarely discussed.[93] As such the difference between the record and the narrative is significant.

There are a number of other areas which would reward further examination. Three of these will now be considered. The first is the similarity of the opponents faced by the British in Malaya and Kenya. The second is the approaches adopted by Britain to defeat that enemy in Malaya and Kenya. The third, and most interesting, is the omissions from the dominant historical narrative used to describe the campaigns.

Once again the British were faced with a relatively weak opponent, who is frequently perceived as lacking external support, popular support and clear aims. As in Malaya the British faced an enemy who were reasonably small in number, lacked external aid and internal popular support. The record suggests that the British were slow to transfer lessons from one theatre to another and that even once the transfer had begun it was slow and haphazard.[94] The British were once again eventually able to develop a coherent strategic and operational approach which enabled them to conclude the campaign on their chosen terms.

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rose to the rank of full General.

[92] This habit is particularly noticeable amongst study of the campaign by the British military. The only mention for example of the Kenya Emergency on the Battle Group Intelligence Officers Course is with reference to the work done by Frank Kitson and his "Pseudo-Gangs". Author's experience.

[93] Recent scholarship has opened up the Kenya Emergency to a new audience. However, it remains the case that the subject is experienced by most British officers, if it is at all, through the work of Kitson rather than Branch, Anderson or Elkins, all of whom are open about the level of violence applied by the British in Kenya. For a discussion of the innovative intelligence techniques employed by the British in Kenya see Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, 127.
[94] Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, 49, 70.

This monograph uses the Mau-Mau Campaign to highlight three areas of interest. The first of these is the relatively poor performance of the British. This can be seen most clearly in terms of the pace of adaption and learning and the time taken to defeat the Mau-Mau. This is seldom reflected in the traditional historiography of the campaign (such as exists). It is important because it suggests that the rationale that underpinned the high reputation for competence enjoyed by the British military in 2003 was suspect – if our reputation was based on past performance and past performance had in fact been at best mixed, then our reputation was perhaps undeserved. The second area of interest is that as in Malaya the British operational approach was underpinned by a quite savage brutality.[95] The breadth and depth of the savagery of British forces cannot be dismissed as the actions of outliers, as defenders of the British approach will suggest.[96] Rather it was, once again, at the very heart of the British approach. This approach would not have been acceptable to either military or political leaders in 2003, which perhaps calls into question the utility of the historical case studies that support much of modern COIN doctrine. The third area

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[95] The true nature of the British approach to COIN in Kenya has been highlighted in this monograph by reference to Anderson, Elkins, et al. However the best comment on the British approach was made by Enoch Powell, when he spoke in the House of Commons on the alleged atrocities committed in the Hola Camp. "It has been said - and it is a fact - that these eleven men were the lowest of the low; sub-human was the word which one of my hon. Friends used. So be it. But that cannot be relevant to the acceptance of responsibility for their death. I know that it does not enter into my right hon. Friend's mind that it could be relevant, because it would be completely inconsistent with his whole policy of rehabilitation, which is based upon the assumption that whatever the present state of these men, they can be reclaimed. No one who supports the policy of rehabilitation can argue from the character and condition of these men that responsibility for their death should be different from the responsibility for anyone else's death. In general, I would say that it is a fearful doctrine, which must recoil upon the heads of those who pronounce it, to stand in judgment on a fellow human-being and to say, 'Because he was such-and-such, therefore the consequences which would otherwise flow from his death shall not flow.'" See: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/27/hola-camp-kenya-report#S5CV0610P0_19590727_HOC_543; accessed April 21 2013.

[96] An example of this tendency can be found in Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: The West and the Rest* (London: Allen Lane, 2011); it is admirably debunked by Pankaj Mishra in his *London Review of Books* review of the book. See http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n21/pankaj-mishra/watch-this-man accessed 28 April 2013

of interest is how often the British conducted operations against the Mau-Mau in a fashion which modern doctrine (and the general narrative of the British approach to COIN operations) suggests ought to have been highly counterproductive but achieved success nonetheless. The reluctance to examine this idea and the evidence behind it is intriguing. Put bluntly – the Kenyan Emergency shows how and where reality diverges from the COINista narrative.

By the time a State of Emergency was declared in Kenya the British had been fighting the MCP/MRLA for four years. This makes the time it took the British to transfer effective operational techniques and approaches from one theater to another somewhat surprising. Indeed it seems reasonable to assert that it was not until the arrival of Lieutenant General Sir George Erskine[97] in May 1953 that the British began actively to transfer the lessons from Malaya to Kenya. The blame for this must lie with the British military, rather than the British civil authorities, as it seems from his requests for a Director of Operations to fill the Briggs/Templer role that Baring was well aware of the cognitive approach that would need to be adopted for success to be achieved.[98]

Prior to Erskine's arrival neither the senior leadership of the British Army (in the form of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir John Harding) nor the operational level leaders (in the form of the Chief Staff Officer to the Governor, Major General William Hinde) appear to have recognized the utility in adopting a Malayan approach. Harding was reluctant to provide a sufficiently senior or dynamic officer to fill the role of Chief Staff Officer (a Director of Operations-lite). Hinde adopted a number of techniques that had failed in Malaya. His emphasis on large unit operations is particularly confusing, for two reasons. First these techniques had

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[97] General Sir George Erskine (1899-1965) served as G.O.C. in C East Africa Command from 1953-55. He had previously served as divisional commander in World War Two and would go on to serve G.O.C. in C. Southern Command after his service in East Africa.

[98] WO 216/560.

demonstrably failed in Malaya. Secondly they did not fail in Kenya. Large unit operations in

Kenya proved to be particularly effective in breaking the urban insurgency.[99] If nothing else this

should suggest that counterinsurgency techniques must be developed in accordance with what

works in any given location, rather than a set of generic principles.

It was not until after the replacement of Hinde with Erskine that the British began to

adopt the techniques that had proved so successful in Malaya at both the tactical and operational

levels. These techniques included smaller-scale patrolling, an emphasis on intelligence-led

operations, and an increased emphasis on civil-military cooperation through the establishment of

civil-military committees at all levels, for example. The promulgation of the 1954 Handbook of

Anti-Mau-Mau Operations, which reflected many of the approaches and techniques directed in

the Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya handbook, formalized this process.[100] It should be

stressed though that Erskine himself saw the Handbook as a book of ideas to guide operations

rather than as a series of rules to be slavishly followed – he understood that COIN was context

specific. In short, models, so beloved of political scientists and military officers alike, could not

be applied without regard to the circumstances that existed.

The actual extent to which Malayan techniques were adopted by field forces remains

open to debate. The requirement for protracted patrolling was missed, with forces in Kenya

showing a tendency to call off operations that did not show immediate signs of success (although

as Beckett notes, the nature of the Mau-Mau hindered the successful use of the ambush

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[99] Ian F. W. Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies,* 126. Beckett
comments that the "Old-style sweeps...had actually broken the back of the insurgency and it was
only then that modern counter-insurgency techniques began to work." The arrival of Erskine and
the success of Operation ANVIL, which was based on the cordon and search operations
conducted in Palestine and saw 25,000 security forces detain over 16,000 suspects, also indicate
the unlikely (to modern minds) success of large unit operations.

[100] See Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, 103 and WO 276/159,
"Telegram from GHQ East Africa to GHQ Far East Land Forces, 11 August 1953."

techniques developed in Malaya).[101] The continued reliance on large scale operations, such as

Operation Anvil (against the urban Mau-Mau in Nairobi) and Operation Hammer (against the

Mau-Mau operating in the Aberdare mountains) also calls into question the extent of lesson

transfer. Large scale operations were successful though, notwithstanding the fact that Malayan

experience suggested that they would not be.[102] What does become clear from these various

examples is that where the Malayan model was imported it was done wholesale and without

nuance. Furthermore the (limited) restraint shown in Malaya was absent in Kenya.[103]

Away from the "pure" military sphere of kinetic operations, there is also considerable

evidence that the British failed to adopt the lessons identified in Malaya in the realm of

psychological operations. There are a number of reasons for this shortcoming. These include the

failure of the British to identify that the Mau-Mau would be a persistent threat and the stated

desire on the part of the British authorities in London to limit the comparisons between the Mau-

Mau and the MCP/MRLA. The reason for this reluctance to countenance a comparison between

the Mau-Mau and the MCP/MRLA is open to debate. It seems likely that it was the result of a

number of factors. These factors included an understanding that the casting of the Mau-Mau as

primitive savages served to facilitate the operational approach adopted by the British in Kenya, a

reluctance to accept that the Mau-Mau had legitimate political grievances and a desire to maintain

the status of Kenya as a Crown Colony.

Where the British did adopt the techniques of Malaya, such as in their efforts to persuade

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[101] Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, 126.

[102] Imperial War Museum Papers, Private Papers of General Sir George Erskine, 75/134/4. "The Kenyan Emergency, June 1953 – May 1955. A Report by General Sir George Erskine."

[103] The work of Andrew Mumford drew the attention of the author to the differing application of the Malayan approach in Kenya by Wade Merkel, "Draining the Swamp: The British Strategy of Population Control," *Parameters*, 36 (Spring 2006): 41.

the Mau-Mau to surrender, they failed to use the most effective tool to do so as identified in

Malaya – cash. Instead they relied on a series of other techniques – the inspiration of fear, a

ruthless use of force and a willingness to act outside the law. This extra judicial approach will be

examined now.[104]

"African Standards in Africa"[105]

The British, as they had in Malaya, set up a process of rehabilitation for those believed to

be either former Mau-Mau or captured Mau-Mau. Between July 1953 and the end of the

emergency in 1960 some 80,000 Kikuyu men and women passed through this "Pipeline".[106] By

1954 there were 64,000 detainees awaiting processing; the maximum figured reached in the

Malayan Emergency was 1,200.[107] This suggests that either the Emergency in Kenya was on a

rather different scale to that experienced in Malaya (a conclusion not supported by any other

evidence[108]) or that the standards applied by the British were rather different.

The approaches adopted within the program were rather different as well. The theoretical

underpinnings of the program were the same, based on the experience gained by Thomas Askwith

(the Commissioner for Community Development in Kenya) in Malaya in 1953.[109] These stressed

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[104] Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, 63.

[105] Enoch Powell, Speech to House of Commons, 27 July 1959,
http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1959/jul/27/hola-camp-kenya-
report#S5CV0610P0_19590727_HOC_543 accessed 28 April 2013.

[106] Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, 53; Elkins, "The Struggle for MauMau
Rehabilitation in Late Colonial Kenya," *International Journal of African and International
Studies* 33(2000): 25-26.

[107] Randall Heather, "Intelligence and Counter Insurgency in Kenya, 1952-56," *Small
Wars and Insurgencies*, 5 (1990):71.

[108] The numbers of civilians killed in Kenya compares favorably to the number killed in
Malaya for example – 1,851 to 2,472.

[109] See CO 822/703 for the correspondence relating to this visit; there is significant

a clear distinction between sympathizers and active insurgents. Of paramount importance was an emphasis on re-education not punishment. First-hand accounts of those who experienced the process[110] and recent historical research however suggests that such an approach was honored more in the breach than the observance.[111] The interesting thing is not that the British behaved aggressively. This was a common feature of the British approach. What is interesting is that, unlike in Malaya, they did not seek to place what they did within the law.

It is this willingness to act outside the law that makes the Kenyan Emergency such an interesting case study. Earlier in this monograph it was argued that the Malayan Emergency was less a COIN campaign than an innovative approach to decolonization. The approach adopted by the British in Kenya, which "can only lend itself to the conclusion that Africa represented something different in the mindset of the British political class"[112] was more akin to that of the suppression of colonial unrest, in the manner of Moplah or Amritsar, than it was to a classic COIN campaign (where the political settlement is of paramount importance). [113]

This unique (at least in the post-World War world) approach can be found in a number of other areas of the Mau-Mau Revolt. For example the resettlement program experienced by the Kikuyu owed more to the concentration camps of the Boer War than it did to the model villages of Malaya.[114] The rate of execution for crimes relating to the insurgency (1,090 executed out of

evidence to suggest that Templer was reluctant to support the training requests originating in Kenya.

[110] Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, *Mau Mau Detainee* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), quoted in Mumford, *The Counterinsurgency Myth*, 54.

[111] Elkins, "Mau Mau Rehabilitation", 32; Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, 101-106.

[112] Mumford, *The Counter-Insurgency Myth*, 55.

[113] The number of deaths amongst the indigenous population in the Moplah Campaign, and the casual nature in which they were inflicted suggests that it is a good parallel with Kenya. See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India:1885-1947* (Basingstoke: South Asian Studies, 1984).

3,000 that stood trial[115]) looks a lot more like the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny than it does the result of good judicial practice.[116] The British may well have been slow to export the tactical approach that was felt to have proved so successful in Malaya[117] (although the exact utility of this approach can be questioned, as discussed above)[118] but it is clear that they did not fail to export the use of force. This was in fact a key part of the British approach in Malaya and remained so in Kenya. Kenya was not an outlier falling outside the mainstream British COIN experience – it was rather the Platonic ideal of the British COIN experience.

The record suggests that the British had long understood that fear was a highly effective mechanism to control populations in a colonial situation.[119] It is possible that in Kenya the British applied this maxim without restraint and took it to its logical conclusion. There is significant recent research into the British approach, the general tenor of which suggests that the British approach was evidence of "state sanctioned terror"[120] or that it was evidence of "unprecedented ferocity."[121] When such actions were discussed at the time they were taken as being counter-productive – "arbitrary methods used by the police are also playing into the hands

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[114] Anderson, *History of the Hanged*, 294.

[115] Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, 103.

[116] Anderson, *History of the Hanged*, 6-7.

[117] Mumford, *The Counterinsurgency Myth,* 53-61: Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-insurgencies*, 123-126.

[118] Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies,* 126-127.

[119] For an analysis of the foundations of British Imperial power see Robin J. Moore, "Imperial India, 1858-1914," in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, *Volume 3,* ed. A. N. Porter, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 395.

[120] Elkins, *Britain's Gulag*, 73.

[121] Newsinger, "Minimum Force", 50 – a statement which suggests a breathtaking ignorance of British colonial history.

of the Mau-Mau by alienating the goodwill of the law abiding Africans"[122] wrote the United

States Consul General in Nairobi, Edmund Dorsz in 1952. The possibility that the British

occupation of Kenya might have alienated the Kenyan population before 1952 appears not to

have occurred to Dorsz. Dorsz's view was echoed by Major General Hinde who wrote that we

must "ensure that repressive measures do not result in an unbridgeable gap between us and the

Kikuyu."[123] An alternative approach was to label them as being actions taken by a minority of

men acting outside the accepted norms of behavior. As Oliver Lyttelton wrote in his memoirs, the

isolated incidents of atrocities were the result of the "breakdown of the quality of mercy under

strain, or to panic in men of low intellectual capacity or low personal courage."[124]

What nobody, either contemporaneously or subsequently, has wished to discuss is the

fact that the use of excessive force appeared to be extraordinarily successful. Imperialist do not

wish to discuss the treatment of the Mau-Mau because it calls into question the nature of the

British Empire. Advocates of the FM 3-24 approach to COIN do not wish to discuss the Kenyan

Emergency because it suggests that there may be another way to skin the COIN cat. British

practitioners of the Kenyan approach do not wish to discuss it because of the very real doubts of

the legality of their actions. But despite all this, and despite the British were successful in Kenya.

This should not have surprised a student of British imperial history. Such an approach

had proved its utility in the aftermath of the Indian Mutiny, at Amritsar and at Moplah and in

countless other places across the British Empire. The fear that the British approach engendered in

the Kenyan Emergency enabled it to become, as it had in other colonial settings, "a strategic lever

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[122] Consul General of the United States in Nairobi, Edmund Dorsz, October 10 1952, quoted in Mumford, 60.

[123] David A. Percox, "British Counter Insurgency in Kenya, 1952-56: Extension of Internal Security Policy or Prelude to Decolonisation?," *Small Wars and Insurgencies,* 9 (1998): 71.

[124] Lyttelton, *The Memoirs of Lord Chandos*, 402.

for countering the insurgency."[125] Brutality was both a traditional operational approach and an historically effective one. The reluctance of historians to discuss the essential contradiction of the British Empire – that it was an institution that promoted liberal values but rested in large measure on physical force, liberally applied – has set false terms of reference for the ongoing debate on COIN doctrine, whose authors seek to use the British imperial experience as a template for current operations.

This survey of the British approach in Kenya did three things. First it examined the nature of the British Army in Kenya as a learning organization. It suggested that far from adopting wholesale the approaches used in Malaya the British instead acted in a way which runs counter to many of the "lessons" of the Malaya Emergency. This tendency was particularly noted with regard to the scale of operations and the use of an approach which operates within a legal framework. Despite the divergence from COIN "best practice" the British approach proved successful, because it was well suited to the peculiar circumstances that existed in Kenya. The second area that was examined was the use of force and how widespread and effective it was. The third area examined was the effectiveness of the British approach in Kenya. Despite the fact that it ran counter to most of the principles of COIN (as articulated by modern doctrine) and the linked failure of the British to act as a learning organization the overall performance of the British was reasonably effective and the Mau-Mau were decisively defeated.

It is this area which is of most interest when seeking to answer the original question posed by this monograph. The British were successful in both Malaya and Kenya. These successes, together with the seemingly successful campaign in Northern Ireland (the nuances of which were seldom examined by the British, let alone external observers), fed a belief that the

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[125] Huw Bennett, "The Other Side of the COIN", 647.

British would perform well in Iraq – that they somehow had the answer to COIN. The examination of both the Malaya and Kenya case studies suggests that the British approach to COIN differs significantly in practice from that articulated by British theoreticians and the accepted narrative of the "British approach to COIN" in the broader sense and that it was far more reactive to circumstances than the idea of a model approach would suggest. As General Erskine wrote in the foreword to the 1954 Handbook on Anti-Mau Mau Operations:

> No one can forecast what future situation British forces may have to face at home or abroad. While each new threat arises in its own context to present a fresh set of problems, there are certain operational principles that remain valid for countering any type of insurgency. . . . The way in which these fundamentals are applied would have to be adjusted to suit the particular circumstances, but it is apposite to note that the experience gained by the British Army from previous counter insurgency campaigns should not be forgotten or overlooked when considering COIN. . . . This is much more a book of ideas than a book of rules.

Erskine understood that the key was what worked, not what the handbook said. The handbook would offer ideas, but these would have to be adapted in line with the circumstances that existed in any given situation. This flexibility of approach – this reactiveness – has to a certain degree been lost by the British Army in COIN operations. The idea that force and coercion might have a role to play is largely ignored, because it does not fit the narrative that has been developed to describe the British approach to COIN. As nobody wishes to challenge this idea, because to do so would be to mark one out as unthinking, the consensus remains unchallenged. This disparity between narrative and record may be a reason for the inability of British military performance to match expectations in Iraq. The failure to understand that identifying a successful approach to COIN would require an understanding of the circumstances that pertained on the ground, rather than merely the application of a model from elsewhere may have been another. The idea that this difference was deliberately ignored when constructing the

COIN narrative will be examined now.

The mechanism for this will be a brief examination of the British COIN efforts in Aden and South Arabia between 1962 and 1967. If the Malayan Emergency is the golden haired, blue-eyed child of the British approach to COIN then Aden is the Bertha Mason, ignored, locked away and noticed only when it is disruptive.[126] The reasons for this are simple enough. The campaign in Aden and South Arabia during this period was an almost complete disaster, with the British Army unsuccessful and the British Government forced into a humiliating series of retreats. The next section of the monograph will outline what the cause of these defeats was, why they were not studied and what the impact of this failure to learn was to be. The Aden and South Arabian campaign is far too large a subject to be examined as a whole in such a short monograph. Instead this brief account will seek to give a broad overview which highlights salient points and provides a basis for further study on the subject.

<div align="center">South Arabia</div>

A Short Summary of the South Arabian Campaign [127]

In order to examine the Aden and South Arabian Emergency it is necessary to understand a little of the history of Aden Colony and its adjuncts, the Aden Protectorates.[128] Aden was initially an Arab settlement at the southern edge of the Arabian Peninsula. It offered access to, and the opportunity to control, the sea lanes linking East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Indian sub-continent. In 1839 it was seized by British troops, sent from the Bombay Presidency.

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[126] See Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (New York: Penguin, 2006 Edition).

[127] This section builds on the superb work done by Stephen Campbell in his 2012 Art of War Monograph, *An Exit Strategy not a Winning Strategy? Intelligence lessons from the British "Emergency" in South Arabia, 1963 -67* (Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, forthcoming). The author is grateful for his advice and input on this section.

[128] The complex geography and nomenclature of the region is well discussed in Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Referring to the region as a whole as Aden is a little like referring to the United Kingdom as London; however this is the typical shorthand.

Although its physical location suggested a place of some potential, its environmental features mitigated against its development. The interior was mountainous and arid and as such the pace of indigenous economic and political development was slow. The physical environment and its impact on socio-political development in the region also posed a problem to external forces seeking to govern there. Unlike the princely states annexed into or co-opted by Imperial India, Aden and its environs never resembled a unitary state or even a unified social entity. This led to some anomalies in how it was governed by Britain after 1839. From 1839 to 1937 it was ruled as part of India (and was used as a punishment posting for British troops in India) before control was passed to the Colonial Office. Aden was never a high priority for the British – it was important for what if offered, not in and of itself.[129] As the key requirement was a military base which supported control of the sea lines of communication, the surrounding tribal territories were largely ignored. Contact was maintained to ensure that they remained friendly but there were no British troops stationed in the tribal areas, nor any form of direct rule.[130] Given the rationale behind the British presence this made sense. However it did mean that when it came to decolonize Aden in the 1960s the British position was far weaker than it had been in either Kenya or Malaya. For example outside Aden Colony, the British legacy was distinctly limited and the conditions that might encourage an insurgency - poverty, political and religious grievances and a definite enemy (the British) - existed.[131]

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[129] Jonathon Walker, *Aden Insurgency*: *The Savage War in South Arabia, 1962-67* (Stapelhurst, Kent: Spellmount, 2005), 4.

[130] Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber: A South Arabian Episode* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1968) offers a personal account of the laissez-faire nature of British rule in South Arabia prior to the outbreak of the Emergency. See in particular "Part I: The years of complacency, 1951-3 (and before)."

[131] Walker, *Aden Emergency*, Chapters 1, 2-4; see also Peter De La Billiere, *Looking For Trouble: SAS to Gulf Command* (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1994), 191.

By the early 1960s it was clear that the era of direct rule colonies was drawing to a

close.[132] During the period between 1962 and 1967 the UK attempted to achieve a peaceful

colonial withdrawal from Aden Colony and South Arabia as a whole, whilst maintaining

favorable political and military conditions. These were originally to include a continued British

military presence in Aden Colony, in the manner of the sovereign base areas in Cyprus or the port

facilities maintained at Singapore.[133] This was to be achieved through the construction of a new

federal state in South Arabia. This would be dominated by Britain's local tribal and Adeni

partners.[134] They would then consent to a continued British military presence, which would go

some way to ensuring the political and economic viability of the new state.

The British plan for withdrawal showed little awareness of the local conditions. In

addition to the reluctance of any of the proposed constituent parts of the new Federation of South

Arabia to join with each other and the pre-existing conditions which suggest fertile ground for an

insurgency there were also external factors which made the process significantly harder. Both

Egypt and the Yemen Arab Republic were opposed to the putative federation and were also in a

position to foment an insurgency. Furthermore the Egyptian and Yemeni efforts were supported

by the broadly supportive anti-colonial narrative that dominated the discourse on the subject at

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[132] This trend was illustrated by Harold MacMillan's "Winds of Change"; see
http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/apartheid/7203.shtml accessed 28 April 2013.

[133] The British had a habit of retaining rights to military bases after leaving colonial
possessions. Examples include the naval bases at Trincomalee in Ceylon, Singapore in Malaya
and the west coast of Ireland in the Free State.

[134] This new state would include the Aden Colony and the Western Aden Protectorate and
was eventually intended to include the Eastern Protectorate. The Federation initially comprised
the alliance of tribal leaders in the Western Protectorate who finally agreed in 1960 to form this
union after ten years of British encouragement. After even more protracted negotiations, the local
leaders within the Aden Colony then agreed to join the Federation (pending Crown approval) to
create "the Federation of South Arabia." Ultimately, this was the state the British and their local
allies were trying to build, protect, and grant independence to in the face of an Egyptian and
Yemeni sponsored insurgency.

the United Nations[135] (under the influence of the Soviet bloc and the non-aligned nations) and by

the reluctance of Britain's traditional ally, the United States, to back her chosen course of

action.[136] As a result the British soon found themselves facing both a rural insurgency and an

urban terrorist campaign, complicated further by the fact that both were being conducted by at

least two major factions, supported by the Yemen Arab Republic and the Egyptian Intelligence

Services (EIS).

The British attempted to respond by declaring an emergency on December 10 1963.[137]

However the violence persisted in 1964 and then increased in 1965. The National Liberation

Front (NLF) and the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) first weakened the

British and Federal government's position in the tribal areas.[138] They then launched a highly

effective terror campaign in Aden itself.[139] At a time of increasing strategic and financial

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[135] See King-yuh Chang, "The United Nations and Decolonisation: The Case of Southern Yemen," *International Organization,* 26, (1972): 45 for a discussion of UN General Assembly Resolution 1,972, 16 Dec 1963, which called on Britain to end the policies of deportation, and imprisonment without trial of suspected insurgents. See also Karl Pieragostini, *Britain, Aden and South Arabia: Abandoning Empire* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 52; for a description of the actions taken by the UN Committee of 24 (the body which the UN set up to consider decolonization) which rejected the British constitutional proposals.

[136] The reason for this is interesting. As one CIA operative put it "if Nasser had to be 'anti' anything (and he did, in accordance with the principle that it is easier to rally followers against something than for something), we preferred that it be imperialism than Israel." Miles Copeland, *The Game Player* (London:Aurum Press, 1989), 198. See also Wm Roger Louis, "American Anti-Colonialism and the dissolution of the British Empire," *International Affairs,* 61, (1985): 414.

[137] Technically only Aden Colony was covered by the declaration (as the only Crown Colony); however the campaign as a whole ranged across South Arabia.

[138] Walker, *Aden Emergency*, Chapter 5 for a discussion of the Radfan Campaign in the tribal areas.

[139] Ibid., Chapter 9 for details of the terror campaign in Aden City. See also Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies*, 151-159.

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oversight, therefore, Britain found itself conducting (another) COIN campaign against a well-armed enemy that it did not understand and often could not find.

The election victory of Harold Wilson and the Labour Party in 1964 saw significant changes to British policy in South Arabia.[140] By 1966 the Wilson Government had chosen to reverse fifteen years of effort in South Arabia by publically abandoning its commitment to support the Federation of South Arabia. Perhaps most importantly the Wilson Government declared that after independence there would be no permanent British military base in the region nor would the British honor its treaties with the Federation.[141] Interestingly not only did the local allies of the British feel betrayed at this point but the United States, despite its reluctance to support British policy in the region for the past decade, also "regarded it as a betrayal" – which is perhaps less reasonable.[142] From this point the British aims shifted from a continued engagement in the region to the development of an exit strategy. As a result 1966 and 1967 saw British forces and their increasingly shaky local allies in the Federation of South Arabia face a rapidly increasing level of violence and a terminal loss of credibility. As the British had already announced that they had been defeated, the local population made arrangements for a future without them, which encouraged the insurgents.

The British were also unable to train adequately the Federal Forces. This became clear to

[140] The Labour Party, led by Harold Wilson defeated the Conservative Party, led by Alec Douglas-Home in the election of 1964. This ended 13 years of Conservative rule and ushered in a period of semi-permanent financial and political crises.

[141] This came as a significant shock to many; as late as 1965 the CIA predicted that it "was highly unlikely that Britain will decide to abandon the base [Aden] completely". *Declassified Document Reference System (DDRS)*, 'Central Intelligence Agency, Special Memorandum, Subject: Outlook for Aden and the Federation of South Arabia', November 5 1965, 9, quoted in Mumford, *The Counterinsurgency Myth,* 91.

[142] Wm Roger Louis, "The British Withdrawal from the Gulf," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31 (2003): 83-108, especially 84.

the world when the Federal Army and Police mutinied on June 20 1967. Twenty-two British

soldiers were killed and twenty-seven wounded before the British were able to restore some

semblance of order.[143] The remainder of the campaign saw the British regain some small measure

of tactical credibility with the re-conquest of the Crater region of Aden City by the Argyll and

Sutherland Highlanders.[144]

Despite achieving some limited local success, in general terms the British were doomed

to conduct a fighting withdrawal whilst the local factions fought for post-war control despite

these tactical successes.[145] The British campaign in South Arabia was not just a failure – it was a

failure which left behind a divided society and an army unable or unwilling to examine the

lessons it had been so painfully taught. Robert Turnbull, the final British High Commissioner to

South Arabia, commented that the British legacy in South Arabia was limited to "the game of

association football and the phrase fuck off."[146] Even if the campaign is examined through the

lens of the very much reduced post-1966 aims it was a failure. But it is the nature of that failure

that must be examined if we are to answer the questions posed in this monograph.

Assessing the South Arabian Campaigns – The Reasons for Failure

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[143] See Walker, *Aden Emergency*, Chapter 12 for details of the causes, direction, reaction to and aftermath of the mutiny.

[144] It is interesting to note that Mitchell, the C.O. of 1 A&SH had served in Kenya as Brigade Major. It is possible that this may have influenced his approach in Aden.

[145] For a discussion of the actions of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders see Walker, *Aden Emergency,* Chapter 13 and Colin Mitchell, *Having Been a Soldier* (Glasgow: Hamish Hamilton, 1969).

[146] Dennis Healy, *The Time of My Life* (London: Penguin, 1990), 283. Healy was Secretary of State for Defence during the withdrawal from Suez; he had served during World War Two as a Beach Control Officer, most notably at Anzio. He was responsible for much of the restructuring of the British Armed Forces that was conducted during the late 1960s, including the general withdrawal from East of Suez; he later became Chancellor of the Exchequer, in which role he again had to balance Britain's perception of its role with its reduced financial circumstances.

The South Arabian campaign shares many similarities with the Iraq campaign for the counterinsurgent forces. The Iraq and South Arabia campaigns were both fought under great public scrutiny, against a backdrop of diplomatic unease, external interventions, and a lack of understanding of the local environment. The British failed in South Arabia for a variety of reasons, all of which give an insight into the similar failure in Iraq. Unlike either the Malayan Emergency or the Kenya Emergency, the British were faced with an insurgency backed by an external power[147] which was given additional motivation to act against the British as a result of British actions in support of Israel during the 1967 War.[148] In addition to these factors the geographic location of South Arabia made for a more complex COIN environment. The circumstances suggest that the British faced a fundamentally less hospitable environment in South Arabia than they had in either Malaya or Kenya. In addition the attention paid to the Emergency by the world's media and the United Nations Organization (UN) also limited Britain's ability to use its traditional repressive measures.[149] It is worth noting though, that when these measures were used by the British, particularly in the aftermath of the re-conquest of the Crater by the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, they proved no less successful in the short term than they had ever been. However the growing limitations placed on British actions by media scrutiny meant that these techniques could not be used as widely as before.[150]

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[147] See Campbell, *An Exit Strategy,* 30-33 for a discussion of Egyptian and YAR support to NLF and FLOSY.

[148] Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies,* 155.

[149] Walker, *Aden Insurgency*, Chapter Ten, for details of the media coverage of the Emergency; see King-yuh Chang, "The United Nations and Decolonisation: The Case of South Yemen," *International Organisation*, 26 (1972): 45, for a discussion of the role played by the United Nations.

[150] Walker, *Aden Emergency*; Campbell, *An Exit Strategy*; and Mitchell, *Having Been a Soldier*, offer three very different but complimentary perspectives on the use of force in the South Arabian Campaign. A synthesis of these three schools would perhaps suggest that force is useful

The British also struggled to overcome the disadvantages their approach to South Arabia as a whole placed them under. Unlike either Malaya or Kenya, they had never fully extended their writ to the whole of the operational area, which shortfall limited the effectiveness of the Emergency legislation. This is not to say that the British had the level of control over Malaya in particular which is often assumed – the failure of the Malayan Union experiment demonstrates that this is not the case – but the fact remains that they possessed, *de jure*, the right to impose their will over the whole of Malaya, which was emphatically not the case in South Arabia. The nature of British rule also placed their intelligence efforts during the Emergency under a severe disadvantage.[151] Not only did the British begin the Emergency badly prepared and under resourced[152] (as was also the case in Malaya and Kenya) but they were never able to make up for this poor start. Their efforts were also hampered by a number of other factors. These included the apparent inability of the British to pass lessons from one theater to another;[153] the rapid destruction of the pre-Emergency police intelligence gathering structures and the difficulty in replacing them;[154] the lack of co-operation between the military and the police;[155] and the failure to work as closely with local allies as was managed in Malaya (and to a lesser extent in Kenya).[156]

However the key reason for the British failure goes beyond the enhanced level of

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at the tactical and operational level, but leads to strategic failure by its very nature.

[151] Campbell, *An Exit Strategy*, 4-7.

[152] Sir Kennedy Trevaskis, *Shades of Amber: A South Arabian Episode,* see Part I especially.

[153] S. Hutchinson, "The Police Role in Counterinsurgency Operations," *RUSI Journal*, December 1969, 351.

[154] Walker, *Aden Emergency*, Chapter 7.

[155] Superintendant Bill Fairhome, quoted in Walker, *Aden Emergency*, 146.

[156] Walker, *Aden Emergency*, 148.

difficulty that the South Arabian Emergency posed and the British failures to react to that. The key reason for British failure can be found in the shifting aiming point that underpinned the political aims of the British during the conduct of the Emergency and the decision essentially to withdraw from the conflict.

Fred Halliday may have been correct when he suggested that the change of British Government in 1964, from the Conservative led government of Alec Douglas-Home to the Labour led government of Harold Wilson did not lead to any very significant changes of policy.[157] However, it remains the case that the Labour Party did, in its 1966 Defence Review, undercut the stated policy of the British Government which was to retain a base in Aden after independence. The Douglas-Home government had agreed this with the tribal leaders of the Federation in June 1964. [158] The Wilson Government's declaration did undermine the cause of loyalists within the Federation and left the security forces to conduct a withdrawal "in contact."

It is easy to blame the Labour Party for the failure of the campaign in Aden, and many do.[159] The costs, political and military, of a base in Aden though, were "out of all proportion to the gains" and so withdrawal seemed the best available option.[160] Furthermore the ability of the

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[157] Fred Halliday, *Arabia without Sultans* (London: Penguin, 1974), 201. Halliday argues that the main difference between the Conservative and Labour positions on Aden was that the Labour Party was "more aware of objective difficulties and more able to put on a conciliatory face."

[158] DEFE 13/570, 'South Arabia Conference Report, 29 June 1964'. The report states that it was agreed that full independence would be granted to the Federation of South Arabia no later than 1968.

[159] David Ledger comments that "Labour took the road to ruin with scarcely a backward glance." See David Ledger, *Shifting Sands: The British in South Arabia* (London:Peninsular Publishing, 1983), 61. Thomas Mockaitis comments that "in no previous internal conflict had a change of government led to a reversal of policy in the middle of a campaign…." See Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counter-insurgency in the Post-Imperial Era* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 66.

[160] Healy, *The Time of My Life*, 284.

British economy to bear the costs of a worldwide role was limited. Where the Labour

Government of the time can be blamed is the decision to announce, and complete, the withdrawal

of troops from an Emergency, before putting an acceptable post-colonial authority in place.

The policies of the British government from 1964 onwards highlight that all

counterinsurgency is political. The British Government made a political decision to withdraw

from South Arabia, in line with its assessment of the value of the object at stake. In the case of the

Federation of South Arabia it made a decision that it was no longer worth the effort. This

decision looked sensible at the time; it looks less so today. The South Arabian campaign also

suggests that if the needs of the military side of the campaign are ignored, then political defeat is

the likely result. If a military victory requires greater short term political commitment then that is

a requirement that cannot be ignored. Perhaps one lesson of the South Arabian campaign is that

political victory cannot be achieved without a military victory.

This monograph posed two questions. Where does the South Arabian campaign fit into

them? In terms of both why the British were expected to perform well in Iraq and why they did

not meet those expectations, three areas suggest themselves. The first is that South Arabia was

largely absent from the corporate memory of the British Army pre-2003, so British failures there

did not impinge on the narrative of British success in COIN campaigns. The second is that it

suggests that the ability of the British to employ their traditional coercive COIN techniques was

increasingly limited by the increased media coverage given to such campaigns and that this would

have a significant effect on future success. As these techniques were largely ignored by the

traditional narratives in the first place, this important warning was missed. The third is the

importance of political will highlighted by the Arabian campaign. The British military in South

Arabia did not receive the necessary political backing to succeed. As a result it failed. This was

another lesson from South Arabia that was missed when considering operations in Iraq – the vital

importance of lasting political support for military operations.

<center>Conclusion</center>

This monograph has attempted to answer two questions. These will now be revisited to see if any answers have been forthcoming.

The first question posed was "why were there such high expectations of British performance in a COIN campaign in 2003?" The three case studies examined suggest that there are a variety of reasons for why the British Army was thought likely to be good at COIN operations but that interestingly these reasons bear little relation to those most frequently articulated.

The first part of the answer to this question must lie in the fact that, objectively, the British Army and its allied security forces did perform remarkably well when faced with the problems of decolonization. In two of the three case studies examined they were able to set the conditions for the decolonization process by achieving a measure of dominance over the insurgents that they faced. What is particularly interesting is that this examination of the case studies suggests that they did so in a manner far removed from the traditional narrative of the restrained British approach to counter insurgency. Instead it was their willingness to apply the techniques of colonial rule – namely the willingness to apply dramatic levels of violence whenever required – that enabled them to defeat the military element of the insurgency. The exact nature of the British approach to COIN was disguised through the use of euphemistic language. This led to frequent misunderstandings about the meaning of British writers by later analysts. In addition the British approach led them to practice the most dangerous of deceptions – self-deception.[161] This was coupled with a supremely pragmatic political approach which concentrated not on achieving the ideal solution but on achieving an acceptable solution. This approach often led to the rights of minority groups, such as the Chinese in Malaya, being ignored.

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[161] Perhaps the best example of this use of euphemistic language can be found in Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, particularly 50-84.

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In a colonial setting the British were very good at picking a side and backing it. This rather less palatable approach to COIN operations does not find a place in the dominant historical narrative, which prefers to emphasize the primacy of the rule of law, the respect for individual rights and the use of minimum force. Events that fell outside of this narrative were ignored by the British political nation, both at the time and today.

Even if one accepts the divergence between the traditional narrative and the historical record then the narrative of British success remains strong. This suggests the idea that one reason for the expectations of a high level of British competency in COIN operations in 2003 may well have been the belief that past performance would be the basis of future success. However, the performance of the British Army in COIN was by no means as impressive as the traditional narrative suggests. The limited role of the South Arabian campaign in the collective memory of the British Army,[162] its educational processes,[163] or the popular and academic literature on the subject of COIN as a whole,[164] suggest that there is an additional reason why the British Army's high reputation in COIN operations remained intact. Put brutally, this is that the British were reluctant to discuss campaigns, or elements of campaigns, in which they had failed to achieve similar success. It is worth considering how different for example, the reputation of the United States military in the field of COIN might be if the narrative of their involvement in such conflicts consisted solely of discussions of operations in the Philippines and El Salvador. However the narrative of British success, achieved by a reliance on minimum force and obeisance

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[162] During the Captain to Major education course of the British Army attended by the author the Aden Emergency was dismissed with the following sentence "why are we interested in Aden – it is just a mad right winger [Colin Mitchell] doing his thing". Personal experience of author, Edinburgh, January 2010.

[163] Battle Group Intelligence Officer Course, personal experience.

[164] The relative number of books and academic studies of the Malayan Emergency and the Aden Emergency is indicative of this.

to the rule of law, linked to adaption and development of the mechanisms of a learning organization, proved remarkably enduring and was taken up by modern authors and soldiers who used it as a tool with which to promote change within their own armies.[165] So a second reason for the high standing of the British in the realm of COIN operations might be that an image of "adaptable, subtle, intellectual Brits" suited the needs of certain individuals within Anglophone military establishments.[166]

To summarize the answers to the first question that this monograph posed then, it seems reasonable to suggest that expectations of British performance in Iraq were so high because the narrative, dominated as it was by British successes, suggested that it would be. The problem that the British were unable to address was that the techniques that had largely created that high reputation had been airbrushed out of the corporate memory. The British Army thus had a deeply flawed understanding of the reasons for their own past success.

The answer to the second question – "why was there such a discrepancy between expectations and reality?" – must be linked to the answer to the first. Based on the dominant narrative the British Army had developed a flawed understanding of the reasons for its successes in COIN campaigns. They then endeavored to act in accordance with the lessons that this flawed understanding and narrative, stressing a legalistic, "soft" approach to the problem of imposing colonial rule on a newly-conquered people. In the words of David Killcullen, their approach never developed much beyond "look at us – we're on the streets in our soft hats and everyone loves us."[167] Furthermore it is perhaps possible that as a result of changes to the way that such

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[165] Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 38-45, 361-365.

[166] Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup*, is perhaps the best single example of this tendency.

[167] David Kilcullen, "CNA Panel on British COIN, 31 July 2008 http://insurgencyresearchgroup.wordpress.com/author/betz451/ (accessed 29 November 2012).

campaigns were reported on (visible as early as the South Arabian Campaign) that the traditional techniques that lay beneath the shallow understanding of the British approach – forced resettlement, internment without trial, withdrawal of civil liberties – was becoming harder and harder to adopt. Put simply, the techniques of colonial rule are far harder to use today than was the case even in the 1960s.[168] This is a tremendously seductive idea. It suggests that our failures may not in fact be our fault. The rules of the game, it suggests, have changed to ensure that we can no longer win. However the record of the Sri Lankan Army against the LTTE suggests that if the political will is there, these methods can still be used today and that they remain as effective as they have always been.[169] Once more success comes down to will. Whether that will can ever exist in a democracy operating outside of its home territories is another question.

This links to a third possible element behind poor British performance in Iraq. The South Arabian campaign suggests that there must be some willingness to "stay the course" politically if military success is to be achieved. The subject of British political commitment to the Iraq War is a subject beyond the scope of a complete monograph, let alone a small part of one. The lack of British political commitment to operations in Iraq must be considered as a potential cause of British military failure.

In essence then, the answer to the second question can be found in a combination of at least two elements. The first was an inability to understand why they had been successful in the past. The second was an unwillingness to use the techniques that had proved successful in the past, because of the changing moral and political environment. The subject of political commitment must be taken into consideration but requires far greater examination.

At the start of this monograph it was stated that the potential military utility of this

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[168] Professor Les Gelb, interview with author, March 2013

[169] Ashok Mehta, *Sri Lanka's Ethnic Conflict: How Eelam War IV was won* (New Delhi: Centre for Land Warfare Studies, 2010).

historical survey of British COIN campaigns would be examined. These can be divided into two realms; the intellectual and the technical. These will now be examined.

The first is that COIN is not painless. That is not to say that it is uniquely difficult, or that it is indeed the "graduate level of war" as some would have us believe. But this study suggests that COIN, to be successful, requires the application of military force to a civilian population. Against anything but the least committed enemy, soccer balls and development projects alone are insufficient – they need to be leavened with a healthy dose of control, which the military is best suited to deliver. COIN should therefore be a last resort – something one does when things have gone badly wrong – rather than a tool to be used during the process of nation building. This is a point which is of particular importance in the modern environment, in which COIN has mutated into a sort of armed social work or development project on steroids, to be used as an instrument of policy in which we are able to mold societies almost painlessly to a shape which better meets our view of how the world should be.[170] COIN does include elements of nation building (for example the role that it can play in the development of a national foundation myth, as was at least partly the case in Malaya) but it more frequently seeks to block the development of a nation (examples include Algeria, the failed Tamil Homeland and even Northern Ireland). We should not set out with the intention of "doing COIN" not least because COIN often leads us to actions which fall outside of our behavioral norms. Put simply this monograph suggests that successful modern COIN is usually nasty, brutal, and long because the techniques which allowed it to be nasty, brutal, and short have fallen into abeyance.

This leads onto the second lesson. This monograph suggests that the ideas that underpin much of the traditional narrative of the British approach to COIN (minimum force, a legal framework, civilian primacy and so on) offer an only partial picture. A truer, deeper picture of the British COIN experience would highlight as well the use of judicial murder, tacitly approved

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[170] Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 364.

torture, a unified command structure (which as often as not requires a military officer to head it), and a willingness to remove traditional rights and protections from the people, along with a carefully crafted narrative that puts a velvet glove on the mailed fist. It is population centric certainly, but not necessarily in the way which that term is usually interpreted.[171] Successful COIN, this monograph argues, is violent COIN. Given that it is also suggested that COIN is something that we do when things have gone wrong, the decision to deploy to a theater where it seems probable that there will be a requirement to conduct expeditionary COIN operations needs to be subject to proper scrutiny. The value of the object at hand needs to be properly assessed and the level of commitment required properly understood. The current vogue for COIN as a form of nation building pushes against this need for proper consideration of the risks involved and an understanding of the required level of disciplined cruelty. It cannot be stressed enough – COIN is something we do when we have failed. To choose to do it, on someone else's turf, seems at best blind and at worst willfully stupid.

Thus the key intellectual lesson to be drawn is that there is a requirement to understand the nature of the struggle in which one has chosen to become engaged. This feeds into the key technical lesson – that there is a rather greater degree of violence and cruelty involved than is commonly asserted. This then leads us back into the intellectual realm – the value of the object. The very techniques that offer success undermine the cause for which they are employed. The British experience offers one final example of this.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the essence of the British Empire was a contradiction. The British, as an imperial power, regarded the possibility of the application of sudden and emphatic violence as essential to quell potential threats. The ability and willingness to bring to bear significant military force on areas troubled by internal unrest was considered

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[171] Colonel Gian Gentile, interview with author, April 2013.

especially vital after inaction was blamed for the spread and early successes of the Indian Mutiny. There was a "constant fear that failure to act swiftly and vigorously whenever trouble threatened was to invite more, perhaps on a scale which might prove unmanageable."[172] For all that it built railways and developed nations, the British Empire was fundamentally despotic. As Robin Moore argues "in 1914 as in 1858 the Raj was essentially a despotic foreign regime dependent on military power,"[173] with the possibility of the application of this military power to solve internal unrest serving as a deterrent and as the Empire's ultimate guarantor.

However the actual application of this force was in the very great majority of cases incompatible with the self-image of those that administered it. The progressive aims of the British Empire were proclaimed by Thomas Macaulay as the transforming mission of Western education to promote not merely a Pax Britannica but also a Civilis Britannica.[174] For a nation that – in the minds of its rulers at least – sought to define itself as a progressive and positive force, reliance on military force to ensure stability can be seen to create an essential contradiction. The awareness of this contradiction grew greater with the passage of time and the growth of the mass media along with the spread of the British form of politics within and among indigenous peoples, although it had been extant in libertarian British circles at least since the time of the mutiny. Thus the very approach which the British used to maintain their rule undermined it. The United States is in many ways the inheritor of the British imperial tradition – a global power which sees itself as an empire of liberty, spreading positive values across the world. Professor

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[172] Lawrence James, Raj, *The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London: St Martin's, 2000), 295.

[173] Robin J. Moore, "Imperial India, 1858-1914," in *Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume 3*, ed. A . N. Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 395.

[174] D.A. Washbrook, "India, 1818-1860: The Two Faces of Colonialism," in *Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume 3*, ed. A . N. Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 395. The issue is also discussed in C.H. Philips and Mary Doreen Wainwright, eds. *Indian Society and the Beginnings of Modernisation, c.1830-1850* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1976).

Les Gelb speaks for many when he comments that "the American Empire is the most powerful

force for good the world has ever known."[175] But when it actually deploys forces overseas to

physically impose those values, it will be no less despotic than the British Empire was, and will

do the causes it espouses no less damage. The final lesson for the military practitioner from this

study of the British COIN experience therefore is this – argue very hard against the use of

military force to remake other societies and arm yourself with historical case studies that make

that point.

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[175] Gelb, conversation with the author, Council on Foreign Relations, April 1 2013.

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